

Supporting access to finance of women's groups in rural areas in Senegal through digital financial education, mobile banking and mini-Kiosks

SCBF PUW 2022 – 16

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Project Summary

Financial sector partner	Baobab Senegal SA	Targeted segment	Women
Grantee / TA provider	Symbiotics	Targeted outreach	5,000 (financial education & savings); 1,200 (loans)
Co-funding partner	AGFUND	Instrument type	Technical Assistance
Country of implementation	Senegal	Project duration	Nov 2022 – Aug 2026
Product / Solution	Savings and loans; Financial education		

1. Executive Summary

The objective of this product up-scaling support to Baobab Senegal (BBSN) was to strengthen, in parallel, the financial capability and the access to appropriate financial products available to low-income rural women in Senegal, addressing barriers of low financial literacy, limited proximity to banking infrastructure, and low adoption of digital financial tools. This was achieved by combining digital financial education in the local language (Wolof) with group-based training adapted to low literacy levels, and by improving access to savings and credit through agents, mini-kiosks, and mobile banking. The project targeted rural women entrepreneurs, initially in the Thiès region, before expanding to Dakar, Touba, and Louga as implementation progressed. Despite an 8-month delay in contracting the digital implementation partner, which prolonged the field training window, the project ultimately achieved strong results: 6,021 women were trained (100% female), 6,021 savings accounts were opened, and 3,447 loans were disbursed, exceeding the financial access targets originally set. Furthermore, beyond the direct scope of the pilot, Baobab Senegal has since scaled outreach significantly, reaching over 30,000 depositors at the institutional level. Taken together, these results demonstrate that integrating financial education with accessible financial services can effectively drive financial inclusion, and that the model piloted here is a scalable one for rural women more broadly.

2. Context

Access to formal financial services in Senegal remains uneven, with rural populations, particularly women, significantly underserved. In regions such as Thiès, women engaged in small-scale economic activities face multiple barriers, including low financial literacy, limited proximity to banking infrastructure, and low adoption of digital financial tools. As a result, many rely on informal mechanisms such as savings groups¹ (tontines), borrowing from family networks, or holding cash, which limits their ability to grow businesses, manage risks, and build financial resilience.

The financial sector in Senegal has experienced steady growth, particularly in microfinance and digital financial services. However, this expansion has largely been concentrated in urban areas, leaving rural regions underpenetrated. While mobile phone penetration is high², the effective use of digital financial services remains limited among low-income populations due to lack of awareness, trust, and financial capability. The Government of Senegal's financial inclusion strategy explicitly promotes the expansion of digital financial services and financial education, creating a strong alignment with the objectives of this project.

The regulatory environment for microfinance institutions and digital financial services is generally supportive, allowing institutions such as Baobab Senegal to expand their outreach. At the same time, challenges remain in delivering services to remote populations, ensuring customer protection, and designing products that are

¹ World Bank (2021). Global Findex Database 2021: Financial Inclusion, Digital Payments, and Resilience in the Age of COVID-19.

² World Bank Data (2019). Mobile phone penetration (% of population) – Senegal.

accessible to clients with low literacy levels. These factors highlight the importance of combining product innovation with tailored delivery approaches.

Market penetration of formal financial services remains relatively low in rural areas, where access points are scarce and usage rates lag behind urban centres. Consequently, low-income populations continue to depend on informal financial practices that are often limited in scale and reliability. This represents a significant market opportunity, particularly among rural women, who are active in micro-enterprises but remain underserved by formal financial institutions.

The project was designed to address these gaps by combining financial education, digital tools, and proximity-based service delivery. SCBF funding played a critical role in enabling this approach. It allowed Baobab Senegal to develop and digitize financial education content in local language, pilot innovative training and delivery mechanisms adapted to low-literacy contexts, and deploy new access points such as agents and mini-kiosks. These upfront investments involved a high level of operational and financial risk, which would have been difficult to undertake without external support.

Overall, the project responded to a clear need in the market by addressing both supply- and demand-side barriers to financial inclusion. It demonstrated the potential to unlock a large underserved segment by combining accessible financial services with targeted financial education, in line with national financial inclusion priorities.

3. Partnership model

[SASD](#) acted as technical assistance lead and Baobab Senegal (BBSN), as the Financial Sector Partner, led implementation on the ground through its innovation development department, covering kiosk installation, agent recruitment, the formation and financing of women's groups, and participation in client training sessions.

Two implementing consultants were engaged to deliver the technical assistance. [Kajou](#), the digital solutions provider, developed the offline-capable digital financial education modules (video and audio content in the local language, Wolof) and led their technical deployment, while [UpTribe](#) delivered the financial education workstream itself, including the training needs analysis, adaptation of the training modules, training of trainers, and field delivery of client training sessions.

The project was implemented initially in the Thiès region (Keury Kao, Medina Fall, Keur Issa), before expanding to branches in Dakar, Touba and Louga, and subsequently to Kolda and Sédhiou from late 2025, as BBSN rolled out the Masterclass training format described in Section 7 in order to maximise reach within the extended project timeline.

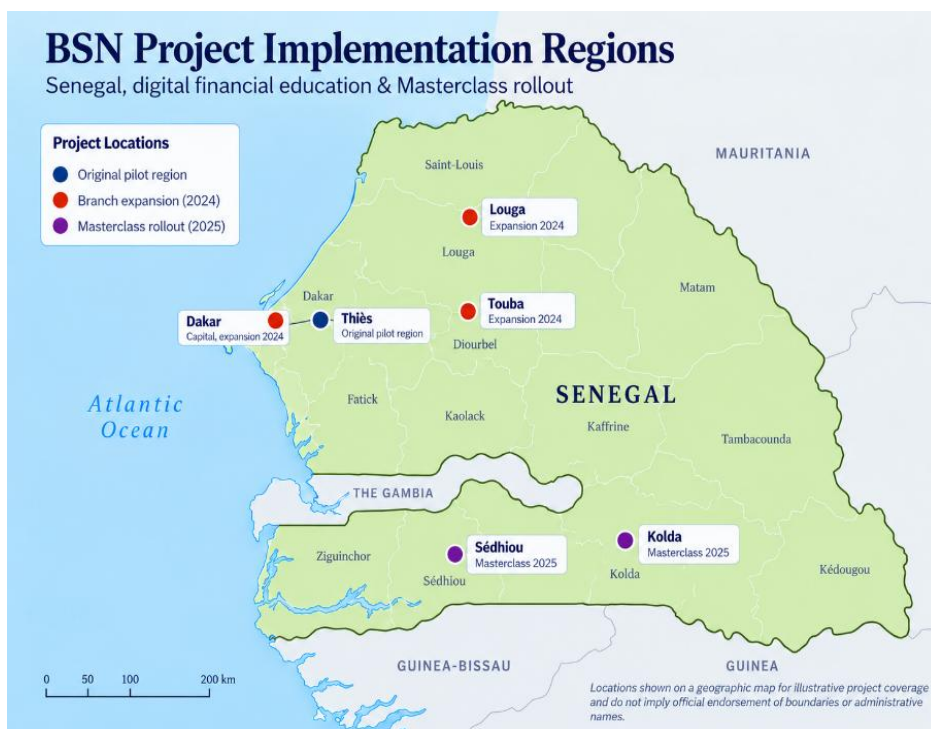


Figure 1: Project implementation regions - Phased geographic expansion

Figure 2: Delivery network: coach zones and service points



4. Intervention approach

The intervention digitised Baobab Senegal's financial education curriculum, which had previously been delivered only via staff tablets during in-person group meetings, in order to make it available as a multi-channel offering accessible through tablet, mobile phone, website and the MyBaobab mobile application. Content covering savings goals, savings mechanisms, credit and entrepreneurship was produced as interactive videos and podcasts in Wolof, and delivered using a learning-by-doing pedagogy, in the form of role plays built around real client scenarios, adapted specifically to low literacy levels. Throughout, the training remained free of charge to clients and continued to serve as a step within BBSN's group-lending credit cycle, rather than as a standalone offering.

Distribution combined field-based group training sessions, 2,408 sessions in total, delivered by 28 trained coaches to 6,021 women organised in 1,204 groups (each group comprising a minimum of five women and completing at least two training sessions) with digital access channels, and was further supported by eight newly deployed agents and two mini-kiosks, which together provided proximity cash-in/cash-out and account services across the target areas. SCBF funding covered the technical assistance itself, namely Kajou's digital development work and Uptribe's curriculum adaptation, training of trainers and field delivery, while BBSN's self-contribution covered kiosk materials and installation, in-country travel and training logistics.

Key innovations centred on offline-capable digital training content delivered in the local language, together with the integration of financial education directly into the MyBaobab application for balance checks, transfers and loan repayments. Gender inclusion was, in turn, built into the design at every level: outreach targeted women's savings and credit groups exclusively, reaching 100% female participation against an original target of 80%; delivery formats were adapted for low-literacy participants through roundtable discussions rather than written assessment; and engagement measures, including Secure Digital (SD) cards preloaded with Wolof-language audio recordings of the training content, refreshments and certificates of participation, helped sustain attendance and completion throughout. A cohort of 28 BBSN staff was also trained as trainers under the SCBF-supported product.

5. Results, outcomes and impact

Key KPIs	Targets	Achieved results (by 31.07.2026)
Total number of people reached	6,200	6,021
- Number of women		6,021 (100%)
- Number of people from rural area		6,021 (100%)
Savings accounts opened	4,000	6,021
- Number of women		6,021 (100%)
- Number of people from rural area		6,021 (100%)
Loans disbursed	1,200	3,447
- Number of women		3,447 (100%)
- Number of people from rural area		3,447 (100%)
Total number of people trained in financial literacy		6,021
- Number of women trained in financial literacy		6,021
Agents deployed	5	8
Mini-kiosks installed	5	2
BBSN staff trained as trainers		28

Beneficiaries reached: All 6,021 clients trained by the close of TA activities were rural women participating in BBSN's group-lending programme, drawn from across Thiès, Dakar, Touba, Louga, Kolda and Sédhio following the mid-project geographic expansion; of these, the full 6,021 went on to open savings accounts, while 3,447 received group loans.

Objectives achieved, by pillar: The project's original design rested on three complementary pillars: strengthening financial capability through digital education, mobile banking, and strengthening physical access to financial services through agents and mini-kiosks. The following was drawn from BBSN's internal client and staff satisfaction study, together with direct client feedback gathered separately.

On financial education, the project not only met but substantially exceeded its objectives: training reach grew from 877 clients at the close of the original TA period to 6,021 by 31 July 2026, and the Wolof-language digital content developed under the project has since been embedded, on a permanent basis, within BBSN's broader group-lending methodology (see Section 6). On physical access, however, achievement was more mixed: mini-kiosk installation reached only two of the five units originally planned, constrained by municipal approval timelines that fell outside the project's direct control, whereas agent deployment, an alternative proximity channel that BBSN scaled in parallel, reached eight against an original target of five, and mobile banking access was granted to all beneficiaries of the TA. Taken together, these results suggest that the project's financial education objective was fully realised, while its physical access objective was realised through a different channel mix than originally envisaged, rather than through the mini-kiosk network specifically.

Direct client feedback gathered from clients points to changes in clients' economic activity since training. Among the clients contacted, several described concrete outcomes including reinvesting business profits resulting in growth of business activity; using accumulated savings to purchase land; higher profits, better control of their business, and growth in stock purchased for resale, alongside an increased ability to save. Some clients reported struggling with saving despite the training, and one specific case reported that despite growth they still struggled with unexpected financial shocks, a reminder that the training's effect on financial resilience is not uniform across clients and others would require sustained mentoring and support.

Explaining the kiosk shortfall: The one indicator that fell short was mini-kiosk installation, at two of the five units planned. Kiosk siting required municipal authorisation in each target locality, and these approvals proved considerably slower to obtain than anticipated at design stage, in a process over which neither BBSN nor the consultant team had direct influence. Rather than allow this to constrain outreach, BBSN scaled agent

deployment in parallel, reaching eight agents against a target of five; agents provide the same proximity cash-in/cash-out and account-opening function as the kiosks, at lower fixed cost and without dependence on municipal authorisation. It is worth noting, furthermore, that the strong overall recovery in training reach followed directly from BBSN's pivot to a Masterclass training format in late 2025, together with a time extension of the TA agreed with SCBF (see Section 7).

Impact measurement: BBSN's quality department ran a qualitative client and staff satisfaction study in October 2025, using a stratified client sample (by rural/urban zone and business activity) collected via Google Forms with support from BBSN's Client Relations Centre, alongside a separate staff assessment against an internal evaluation grid. On the topline findings, overall client satisfaction stood at 90% in the pilot cohort, peaking at 86.7% in Keur Massar; clients rated training content, trainer competence and the appropriateness of the material consistently positively, and identified community-based knowledge transmission between clients as a particular strength. Clients also identified four areas for improvement, namely module duration, access to resources in remote areas, the absence of post-training follow-up, and scheduling constraints on mobilisation. The full findings, together with the client recommendations arising from them, are presented in Annex 1.

Ongoing monitoring (2026–2028): Beyond the survey, BBSN has committed to annual monitoring and evaluation of the trained client cohort through 2028: the database of trained clients will be tracked yearly to assess evolution in credit and savings amounts and any drop-off among clients who do not renew, and the qualitative client/staff survey will be repeated annually for each new training cohort from 2026 to 2028. This runs in parallel with, and complements, the +3-year outreach and KPI reporting required under the SCBF grant agreement.

Investment mobilisation: No additional third-party investments have been reported as leveraged on the basis of the SCBF grant to date. However, as a result of this support, BBSN has received expressions of interest from potential partners wishing to collaborate on consolidating and scaling up its financial education initiatives.

Client Feedback: BBSN completed the client and staff satisfaction survey. Two separate exercises were conducted: (i) a survey of the Masterclass-format trainings delivered in Thiès and Louga, covering client appreciation of the training and their recommendations; and (ii) an evaluation of the original pilot phase in the Dakar suburbs (115 groups, 877 women), covering attendance, engagement and satisfaction by area, plus strengths and weaknesses of the approach. Overall satisfaction was strong across both exercises (around 90% in the pilot evaluation, peaking at 86.7% in Keur Massar). Full findings are provided in Annex 1.

Key results: The project achieved 100% female outreach, more than doubled its loan disbursement target, and left BBSN with a fully owned, local-language digital financial education capability. Following BBSN's post-TA pivot to a Masterclass training format and a time extension agreed with SCBF, the institution went on to substantially exceed its original 4,000-client training milestone, reaching 6,021 clients trained by 31 July 2026.



6. Way ahead: Future scaling and sustainability plans

Following the close of TA activities, BBSN continues deploying the financial education trainings across Dakar, Thiès, Touba, Louga, Kolda and Sédhiou, drawing on the digitised materials and trainer capacity built under the project. Building on this, BBSN plans to institutionalise financial education as a permanent, non-financial service within the client journey for both credit and savings clients, informed in this respect by the October 2025 client and staff satisfaction survey.

By project end, 52 Portfolio Managers (Gestionnaires de Portefeuille) dedicated to financing women's groups, and deployed across 42 branches, had between them opened over 8,094 group accounts. It is important to note that this is a BBSN-wide institutional figure covering the full group-lending portfolio, and is therefore broader than, and inclusive of, the 6,021 savings accounts opened by clients trained under this project; it is presented here as an indication of the scale of the delivery channel into which the project's financial education content has now been embedded, rather than as an additional project result.

Sustainability rests, in this respect, on assets that are now fully owned by the institution: the Wolof-language digital training modules, the trained trainer pool, and the agent and kiosk network, all embedded within BBSN's group-lending credit cycle rather than dependent on it. Continued rollout across the wider branch network is funded from BBSN's own resources, without further SCBF support.

BBSN's commitment extends, furthermore, to structured monitoring through 2028: the database of trained clients will be tracked annually to assess the evolution of credit and savings amounts, alongside any non-renewal or drop-off, and the qualitative client and staff survey will be repeated for each new training cohort between 2026 and 2028, building the evidence base for the financial education service as it continues to scale institution-wide.

7. Lessons learnt and recommendations

What worked well: The group-based, learning-by-doing format adapted to low literacy levels proved effective, and this is borne out in what clients themselves reported: across both survey waves, participants rated explanations as clear, trainers as competent, and the content as appropriate to their needs and expectations, with overall satisfaction at 90% in the pilot cohort (see Annex 1). Post-training uptake of financial products was correspondingly strong, with loan and savings targets substantially exceeded. Low-cost engagement measures, namely SD cards preloaded with Wolof-language audio recordings, refreshments and certificates of participation, meaningfully supported attendance and completion; furthermore, the survey identified community-based knowledge transmission as a distinct strength of the approach, with trained women informally sharing content with peers, extending the reach of the training well beyond the direct participants themselves.

What did not work as planned: At programme level, the client satisfaction survey identified four areas where delivery fell short of what clients wanted (see Annex 1). A number of participants found the module duration too short for the volume of content covered; clients in remote areas reported difficulty accessing training resources between sessions; there was no systematic post-training follow-up or mentoring once a cohort completed; and mobilisation was constrained throughout by the limited time beneficiaries could take away from their businesses. It is worth noting that attendance was lowest in Rufisque and Keur Massar, yet Keur Massar returned the highest satisfaction score of any area at 86.7%, which suggests that participation was constrained by logistics and scheduling rather than by the relevance or quality of the training itself. At project management level, training reach at the close of the original TA period (Q4 2025) reached only 22% of the 4,000-client goal, a shortfall driven almost entirely by the eight-month delay in contracting the digital implementation partner, which in turn compressed the field-training window; kiosk installation (two of five) was similarly constrained by municipal approval timelines. Towards the end of 2025, however, BBSN readapted its strategy by introducing five two-day Masterclasses, which brought together around 2,000 women trained through an inclusive approach delivered in partnership with a coach across Touba, Thiès, Kolda, Sédhiou and Louga; it was this pivot, ultimately, that drove the project past its original training target.

Key assumptions confirmed: Structured financial education drives uptake of formal financial services in this segment: trained women converted to savings accounts and group loans at rates well above target. Offline-capable, local-language digital content is a viable delivery mechanism in low-connectivity rural settings.

Key constraints and how they were overcome: Early challenges around training logistics and coach profiles were resolved through steering committee dialogue; literacy barriers were addressed by shifting to roundtable-based assessment; and lost time was partially recovered through geographic expansion during implementation and continued rollout through a time extension of the TA.

Top 5 recommendations:

1. Retain the group-based, learning-by-doing format adapted to low literacy levels: client feedback consistently identified the participatory methodology, rather than the content alone, as what made the training accessible to this segment.
2. Design financial education as a recurring service rather than a one-off intervention: clients themselves asked for a semi-annual training cadence, and the absence of structured post-training follow-up was the most consistently cited weakness across both survey waves.
3. Build in take-home, offline-capable materials from the outset: SD cards preloaded with local-language audio recordings allowed clients to revisit content between sessions, and proved particularly important for participants in remote areas where access to resources was otherwise a reported constraint.
4. Schedule around beneficiaries' economic activity rather than institutional convenience: attendance, not satisfaction, was the binding constraint in lower-performing areas, and mobilisation was limited throughout by the time women could take away from their businesses.
5. Invest deliberately in peer diffusion: trained women were observed sharing content informally with peers beyond the participant group, and allowing more session time for group leaders to share experience, as clients requested, would extend this multiplier effect at negligible marginal cost.

ANNEX 1:

Client Feedback Survey Results

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Client feedback from two independent survey waves, run ~12 months apart: BBSN Quality Department

Methodology: stratified client sampling (zone/activity), via Google Forms with CRC support; staff assessed separately (Sec. 5)

877

women trained across 115 groups (pilot)

90%

overall satisfaction, pilot phase evaluation

86.7%

peak satisfaction, Keur Massar branch

A. MasterClass-Format Trainings — Thiès & Louga Region (post-pivot, late 2024/2025)

Overall appreciation of the training

- ✓ Explanations rated clear and easy to follow
- ✓ Trainers consistently rated as competent
- ✓ Programme content rated good quality; most participant questions answered clearly on the day
- ✓ Learning objectives met; content judged appropriate to participants' needs and expectations

Client recommendations following training

- ➔ Move to a semi-annual (twice-yearly) training cadence
- ➔ Strengthen Baobab's support for women entrepreneurs
- ➔ Revisit pre-financing terms within the loan product
- ➔ Allow more time for group leaders to share experience

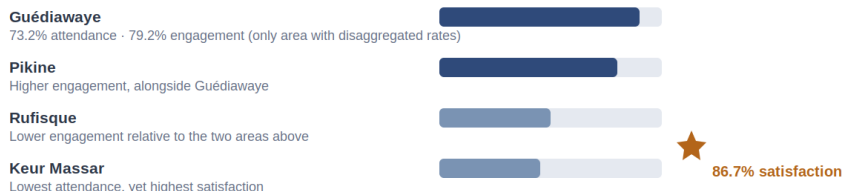
WHAT THIS MEANS

These findings relate to the Masterclass-format trainings introduced in Thiès and Louga from late 2024; it is this same format that BBSN subsequently scaled institution-wide, carrying training reach from 877 clients in October 2024 to 6,021 by the end of 2025 (see Section 5). The recommendations above have been shared with BBSN's product and training teams for consideration as the programme continues to scale.

B. Pilot Phase Evaluation — Dakar Suburbs (115 groups · 877 women, the original SCBF-funded cohort)

Note: this evaluation covers the original SCBF-funded pilot cohort — 877 of the 6,021 total clients trained institution-wide by end-2025 (14.6%). Feedback was not systematically collected from clients trained institution-wide after the project's Masterclass-format expansion (see Section 5).

Attendance & engagement by branch area (relative levels)



Note: exact attendance/engagement rates were disaggregated only for Guédiawaye in the source data; other areas reflect the survey's own qualitative ranking.

WHAT THIS MEANS

It is worth noting that the areas with comparatively lower attendance, namely Rufisque and Keur Massar, nonetheless returned the survey's highest satisfaction scores; this suggests that participation was constrained more by logistics and scheduling than by the relevance or quality of the training itself. Furthermore, the absence of structured post-training follow-up, flagged separately below, is the specific gap BBSN's 2026-2028 monitoring plan is designed to address.

Strengths

- Dynamic, participatory training methodology
- Strong overall satisfaction (90% across the cohort)
- Amplified impact via community-based knowledge transmission — trained women informally sharing content with peers beyond the direct participant group

→ directly reinforces the "more time for group leaders to share experience" recommendation from Section A

Weaknesses

- Module duration felt too short by some participants
- Difficulty accessing resources in remote areas
- No systematic post-training follow-up or mentoring
- Mobilisation constrained by beneficiaries' available time

→ the follow-up gap is the evidence base for the 2026-2028 monitoring commitment (Sections 5-6)

READING THE TWO WAVES TOGETHER

Run independently, ~12 months apart, across different regions, both survey waves converge on the same two conclusions: the participatory, group-based training format works and should be preserved as the programme scales, and clients want more sustained engagement — the basis for BBSN's 2026-2028 annual cohort-monitoring commitment (Sections 5-6).