

Stories of resilience and transformation



from the ZRBF-BRACT Programme



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The many products grown and harvested from the wild through the BRACT project to diversify incomes and diet and increase resilience.



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Introduction

Mutoko and Mudzi districts are hot, dry drought-prone areas in the Northeast of Zimbabwe where communities are exposed to an array of shocks and stresses. The climate in these areas is becoming increasingly variable with frequent droughts and dry spells punctuated by torrential storms. Most people are farmers, but unpredictable weather patterns, water stress and increasing crop and livestock pests and disease have contributed to declining productivity and food insecurity. Zimbabwe's volatile economy characterized by hyperinflation, cash shortages, exchange rate fluctuations and shortages of basic commodities has led to widespread poverty, weaker markets and eroded incomes, making communities more vulnerable to shocks which are increasing in frequency and magnitude. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these ongoing issues, plunging some households into survival mode with coping strategies that impacted negatively on their health and well being.

It is against this background that the five-year Building Resilience through improving the Absorptive and Adaptive Capacity for Transformation of at-risk communities in Mutoko and Mudzi Districts of Zimbabwe (BRACK) project was implemented. Supported through the Zimbabwe Resilience Building Fund (ZRBFF), the project was delivered by the BRACK consortium comprising of Christian Aid (Lead Partner), Bio-Innovation Zimbabwe (BIZ), Community Technology Development Organisation (CTDO), Nyahunure Community Trust (NCT) and Silveira House (SH). The project reached more than 27000 people with a goal of ensuring that households and communities' livelihoods are able to withstand existing and future shocks and stresses and achieve well being.

By addressing multi-dimensional challenges and enhancing resilience capacity, the BRACK project has contributed to building thriving and responsive households and communities. Through collaboration with multiple stakeholders, from ward to district level, the project has effectively achieved its output and outcomes while scaling-up impactful interventions.

Thanks to a flexible design and use of crisis modifiers (funding resources that can be re-deployed to respond to emergencies and contain their potential to disrupt the resilience trajectory), the project was highly adaptive. Four crisis modifier cycles were used to protect the resilience gains and prevent communities from sliding back to vulnerability. Since November 2020, there has been a focus on deepening and sustaining household resilience through upscaling and layering proven high-impact resilience interventions. Evaluations show that targeted individuals and communities have improved their capacity to anticipate, prepare and respond to shocks and stresses whilst maintaining their productive capacity. Over half of the target households had become fully resilient with diversified, viable livelihood strategies. The project also helped transform socio-economic and ecological systems, including improving access to social services.

BRACK project interventions comprised:

- Supporting Ward Development Committees and District Civil Protection and Coordination Committees to develop and regularly review 29 ward Disaster Preparedness and Response Plans and two district Disaster Risk Management plans.

- Strengthening households' capacity to form and maintain effective community savings and investment groups.
- Disseminating climate smart agriculture skills and technologies to increase production, post-harvest handling, storage and marketing of traditional crops and livestock.
- Training groups in improved nutrition behaviour to increase regular consumption of traditional foods.
- Repairing or setting-up irrigation, marketing, and processing infrastructure.
- Training youth, women and minority in off-farm income generation
- Training wild product collectors in sustainable harvesting
- Developing inclusive market strategies linked to private sector buyers
- Supporting community groups to actively participate in local governance, demanding better service delivery and holding duty-bearers to account.

This booklet follows the stories of eleven people whose lives were transformed by the project.



Turning dreams into reality

Knowledge Chikondo is a 35-year-old farmer living with his wife and three children in Kondo Village, ward 2, Mudzi. Knowledge has been farming since he got married in 2005 but he lacked experience in good agricultural methods. Knowledge explains: "When I first started farming, life was really tough. The weather was erratic. Some years we received decent rainfall but other years we got only a few very intense storms then nothing. I was growing groundnuts and sorghum, but yields were poor and the income I got was too low to support my family. I had a real problem finding decent markets and the buyers who I approached offered very low prices for my products."

I heard about the BRAC project when BIZ came to our village to survey the types of wild fruit that were available in the community. I got intrigued and decided to find out more about the project. I realised wild fruit collection could be a great option for me since I was struggling with farming. The good thing about wild fruit is that it grows on its own without any input from people. All you have to do is make sure the trees don't get damaged and harvest the bounty each year. I used to love eating nhengeni (*Ximmenia caffra*), tsomo (*Sclerocarya birrea*), matufu (*Vagueriopsis lanciflora*) and mauyu (*Adansonia digitata*) fruits when I was a kid herding cattle with my friends, but I never thought you could actually make money out of them until BRAC came along.

Nhengeni seeds are valuable because they contain oil which can be extracted to make cosmetics.

When I first started collecting wild fruits my friends thought it was foolish but now that they have seen my success, they all want to join in. I work with my wife since we have both been trained by BIZ in the proper harvesting methods. We go into the forest when the wild fruit is ripe. At the moment the trees are covered with ripe nhengeni. Nhengeni seeds are valuable because they contain oil which can be extracted to make cosmetics.

Knowledge Chikondo harvesting valuable nhengeni fruit (*Ximmenia caffra*) near his home in Kondo Village, Mudzi. The seeds of the fruit are sold to a cosmetics company.

Harvesting must be done in a very hygienic way, so we wear clean clothes and take soap and a container of water with us to wash our hands regularly during harvesting. We also take a hoe to dig a sanitary hole in case we need to go to the toilet while we are in the forest. We also take the special sack used for harvesting that we were given by the project. When we find a nhengeni tree we harvest the ripe fruit only. There are two species of nhengeni. One has deep red fruit when they are ripe and the other has orange fruit. We harvest both types for the private sector buyer known as Kaza Natural Oils. We don't harvest all of the fruit on the trees. Wild animals and other community members need some fruit, and we also need to leave some of the fruit behind to make seed so that the trees can regenerate.

When we process the fruit, we have to find a clean safe place away from the homestead. The government antimalaria team comes to spray our homes once a year against mosquitos and we have to make sure that our produce does not get contaminated. So, I go to a large flat rock about half a kilometre from my home which is actually an ideal place for processing the fruit. To process the fruit, I have to remove the skin and wash the seed. It's quite a process. I have to put the seed in a cloth bag and scrub it on the rock with sand. I have to do this job myself because my wife says her hands are not strong enough! I then wash the pulp and sand off to extract the seed. When the seed is clean, we sort it to remove any that are poor quality then we put it in a clean container and take it back to the homestead where I have made a drying structure using shade cloth supplied by BIZ. The seeds must not dry in the sun as this can affect some of the valuable chemicals that they contain. The seeds take about five days to dry. I test for moisture by biting one seed. If it is dry enough it will be hard. If I am satisfied with the dryness, I pack the seeds in the proper sacks and put them in the dedicated storeroom that I built with the help of the project. I wait for the buyer (Kaza) to come and pay for the product". Knowledge also collects marula fruit when it turns yellow in January.

Apart from wild fruit harvesting, Knowledge also trained with Silveira House to be a welder under the project. A trainer came to the community and trained the group at the local clinic. The training has been a major boost as Knowledge had always wanted to be an artisan. He is looking forward to



Knowledge and his wife harvest fruit from a nhengeni tree close to their home



Knowledge cleans the flesh off the fruit by scrubbing it with river sand

graduating and getting his qualification certificate. Knowledge belongs to a group which shares welding equipment. He is also a member of an internal savings and lending (ISAL) group supported by the project. Training in climate smart agriculture as part of the project has helped improve his crop yields and he notes that since lots of farmers are implementing these new technologies, the ideas are spreading and are more likely to last beyond the life of the project.

“The project has empowered me because now I can provide for my family, pay school fees for my children, household expenses and invest in my other projects”. Knowledge’s wife is thankful for the extra income, and she enjoys wild fruit harvesting. She is particularly pleased because, thanks to the extra income, the family has bought a solar panel which gives them lights and a means for charging their phone. This has made life easier and raised the family’s status in the community. The children are also helping the family.

The community is better-equipped to deal with economic and climate shocks because people are getting better incomes from a range of different sources, not just farming.

When they return from playing in the forest, they often report to their parents that they have seen a new tree with fruit on it. In the past Knowledge had to borrow money to make ends meet but now he is self-sufficient. Knowledge feels that his participation in the project has raised his standing in the community and he is better respected. He hopes to save enough money to buy a welding kit of his own and set up a welding business.

Now that he has the training and extra income this dream has a chance of becoming a reality. Knowledge has also noticed a big change in the community since the BRAC project came along. The new livestock breeds, particularly the tough, productive, Boschveld chickens, have meant that people eat more eggs. This coupled with the nutrition training has meant



Knowledge and his wife dry the cleaned nhengeni fruit on a shade cloth frame at their home

that people are generally getting a better and more diverse diet. People are also growing more vegetables because they are aware of their importance in the diet.

The community is better-equipped to deal with economic and climate shocks because people are getting better incomes from a range of different sources, not just farming. The ISAL groups also really help because they provide people with funds for their own projects. Knowledge feels that the BRAC project is sustainable because of its focus on building peoples’ capacity rather than distributing inputs and assets. That knowledge and confidence to try new things will persist and grow in the community.



Diverse diets, stronger community

Mandigona Kapomba lives with her husband and five children in Nyamhimvu village in ward 2, Mudzi. She has been a village health worker since 2011 when she was trained by Ministry of Health and Child Care officers on how to advise other community members on care for people who have diarrhoea, malaria and other common illnesses. Thanks to training through the BRAC project the family now grows a wide range of crops including cowpeas, maize, finger millet, groundnuts, roundnuts, pumpkins and vegetables but this was not always so. “We used to grow mainly maize,” Mandigona explains “but the rainy season is often very short here – only two and a half months, so there was not enough time for the crops to mature. Yields were low and hunger was a common situation in our household. Because of our meagre income we could not afford to pay for our children to go to school and this made my husband and I feel stressed and ashamed to be seen in our community”.

Mandigona Kapomba of Nyamhimvu village, Mudzi, serving nutritious porridge to the village children



Mandigona was recruited to the BRAC project by one of the lead farmers in the community and she immediately began training in agricultural diversification. "We learnt about growing different crops which are better suited to the climate here and more nutritious. We also learnt about chicken, goat and cattle rearing and how to make livestock feeds to help our animals become more productive. This was a real eye-opener to me. I never realised that you could make stock feed from crop residues and use it to feed the animals during the dry season. Now my animals don't get sick anymore and they are always in good condition even after winter when there is no grass. I also went on a dress-making course run by Silveira House to help me get income from other sources than farming. I also belong to an ISAL which helps me save money". These different activities have clearly helped the family but for Mandigona the most life-changing part of the project has been the nutrition resilience training that she and her neighbours received. "We learnt about the importance of eating many different kinds of food including animal products, legumes, cereals and plenty of fruit and vegetables. It's called the 4-star diet" she explained.

"When we were first taught how to make the porridge, we thought it was going to taste disgusting but it's actually delicious and the children love it".

The group learned how to make a special type of porridge that involved adding many different ingredients. "This porridge is really good for young children who need a good start in life. If they eat this porridge, they will grow up strong and won't be affected by many diseases. It's also great for pregnant women" extols Mandigona. The porridge is made from meal of different ingredients including finger millet, pearl millet, sorghum, meat, pumpkin leaves (or any other green leaf vegetable, butternut, sweet potatoes, peanut butter, and cow peas. These are cooked separately then mixed together in a big pot and milk, eggs and a little sugar are added. "As a village we try to cook a batch of porridge at someone's household as least twice a week. Then we assemble all of the children aged under-5 and pregnant women, and we share the porridge. We make it more often if the ingredients are available. We all contribute from our fields, gardens and granaries".



The children of Nyamhimvu village enjoying their special porridge

Mandigona laughs: "When we were first taught how to make the porridge, we thought it was going to taste disgusting but it's actually delicious and the children love it". The men in the community are also getting involved. Mandigona notes that at one point it was the men who would turn up first to the cooking days to help with the preparation.

Mandigona says that the BRAC project has changed her life in many ways. She gets more diverse produce from her garden and fields and better yields; her livestock are thriving and her standing as a village health worker in the community has increased. She now plans to invest in more livestock and teach more people in her community about the importance of good nutrition. She hopes to be able to save enough money to buy a sewing machine and start a sewing business.

Mandigona has also seen a change in the community as a result of the project. Relations between men and women are improving and incidences of gender-based violence have reduced. "Now men and women are working together to improve our situation" says Mandigona. Other changes that she has noted include an improvement in the condition and productivity of the livestock thanks to the new breeds introduced by BRAC. Most people in the community agree that the ISALs set up through BRAC have been one of the biggest successes for the project. Mandigona jokes: "in the past women always asked their husbands for money but now we can give our men a break because we are earning on our own!" This situation has been facilitated by the gender awareness component of the project led by Nyahunure Community Organisation

The whole community has become stronger. Now if there is a drought we are prepared because we are planting short-season varieties and small grains instead of just maize so we know we will harvest something. Most people are also really seeing the benefits of the improved diet, and this will definitely continue even though the project is over.

Mandigona and her family showing one of the hay bales they have made to feed their livestock during the dry season





The poultry king

Jevas Zisengwe is passionate about poultry and has always kept chickens. He lives with his family including 6 children in Chesango village, ward 8 in Mudzi where life was harsh before the BRAC project was initiated. Although Jevas has always tried his hand at many different farming activities he admits that he was not very knowledgeable before his training with BRAC, and this led to a high livestock mortality rate and low crop yields. "When your cattle die it's serious because it is effectively losing part of your bank account". Explains Jevas. The whole community was struggling with livestock issues mainly linked to a poor diet during the long dry season and recurring droughts. The harsh climate in Mudzi made everything a lot worse and no matter how hard Jevas and his family toiled, they never seemed to achieve much. "Climate change was really affecting all of us – the lack of rain, hunger, and low incomes. Our families weren't getting a decent diet in those days" laments Jevas. "We rarely ate meat or eggs, but everything changed when BRAC started.

Jevas Zisengwe of Chesango village inspecting his poultry



Jevas was trained to make poultry feed using home-grown ingredients such as maize, sorghum, millet, groundnut cake and sunflower seeds

BRAC gave us valuable knowledge to cope with droughts and improve our crop and livestock production. We also learnt the importance of diversifying our sources of income" Jevas has been trained as a lead farmer and resilience focal person in his village. One of the first things he did after being trained in climate smart agriculture was to set up demonstration plots for small grains, sugar beans and other crops using conservation agriculture methods. He also began cultivating stock feeds including lablab bean and velvet bean. Livestock can eat the green matter, dried matter and pulses produced by these legumes and at the same time they improve the soil. "I was trained in feed formulation and how to make hay bales using maize crop residues, treated with molasses and urea which preserve the material so that it can be fed to goats and cattle during the dry season to maintain their condition. I also formulate my own poultry feed using ingredients from my crop production. I have seen a huge rise in productivity of my livestock as a result and I teach the methods to the farmers in my group".

Jevas also joined an ISAL group that was set up as a result of training in financial literacy from the project. "Our group consists of 11 women and six men. We save money together and each month someone can borrow. When they pay back the group shares the interest. We use the profit to buy seeds and fertiliser and each of us got a goat. I have also bought cows, utensils and built a pot rack for our family with my share. We get on well and our group has branched out to do commercial seed production for Marcia sorghum variety and cowpeas. We have a contract with a seed company, Champion seeds to produce about 3 tons of seed".

"This idea of having many different projects has really spread into the whole community and generally poverty levels have reduced despite the droughts. People can now cope better".

Thanks to BRAC things are really working well for us as a family and we are lot busier with all of our different projects! Despite being busy everyone is happy. The children don't have to worry about missing school because we can afford the fees. We have money to cover household expenses and extra to invest in our projects. I have gained a lot of respect in the community as a lead farmer and community resilience co-ordinator. People are always coming to me for advice, even people from quite far away.

Our family diet has really improved. We are now eating meat and eggs regularly. My incubator business is so successful that I am saving up to buy another one as I can't meet the demand. I am also thinking of starting fish farming or even beekeeping and I want to install a tank and a tap from my borehole. Jevas says that the great thing about BRAC was the way it encouraged them to start up many different projects. "This gives us many sources of income which improves our financial stability and many sources of food. This idea of having many different projects has really spread into the whole community and generally poverty levels have reduced despite the droughts. People can now cope better.

One of the most exciting parts of BRAC for Jervas was that he received a solar-powered incubator to increase his income and improve his poultry production. The incubator has three shelves each of which can hold 60 eggs. The eggs take 21 days to hatch which means that Jervas can produce 180 chicks per month. People from the community pay USD20 for incubation of 60 eggs. This has increased poultry production in the whole community. "Normally our hens don't have a good hatching success rate and if they are always sitting on eggs, we don't get to eat them much". Jervas explains. He estimates that he earns about USD170 per month from the incubator alone.

Jervas showing the chicks that has just hatched in his solar powered incubator supplied by the BRAC project



Jervas and his son, with the bull that they bought with income from the BRAC project



You're never too old to learn

Grandmother Taindonzwa Kapfudzaruwa of ward 3, Mudzi, has a busy time caring for her disabled husband and seven grandchildren whose parents are working in South Africa and Harare. In addition to this important role, she also manages the family farm growing maize, sunflower, groundnuts, finger millet and even rice. She also has a wide range of livestock including cattle, goats, chickens, guinea fowl and turkeys. But her farm has not always been like this. Taindonzwa tells the story of how BRACCT changed the way she does things.

"Although I have been a farmer since 1978, I didn't know much about new ways to grow crops and keep livestock. I have always wanted to learn more about farming because it is my passion. I heard about BRACCT from my friends when they were invited to an initial meeting. I wanted to attend the training but because I am so busy and live far away from where the training was being held, it was difficult for me to find time to attend. But my interest forced me to make time and the trainings that I attended changed the way that I farm. I learned how to grow new crops such as kalahari melon and rosella. I learned how to do conservation farming and use organic methods for soil fertility and pest control management. I also learned how to harvest marketable wild products including nhengeni and marula and found out how to improve my goat production and chicken-rearing".

Taindonzwa says that before BRACCT the production from her farm was very low and the changing weather patterns made life really difficult. "No matter how hard we worked we could not improve production and some years the poor rains meant that we harvested nothing" she laments. "We rarely ate or sold chickens or eggs and we generally had very few livestock".

Taindonzwa Kapfudzaruwa standing in a sorghum field that she prepared using conservation agriculture methods

Apart from training, the family also received livestock and equipment to boost their farming set-up. Taindonzwa was chosen to receive a Boer goat buck and 4 Boschveld chickens – two male and two female. Initially she says she struggled with the Boer buck. Because the breed is new to the area, they require lots of vaccinations and medication as they are not resistant to the local pests and disease. Also, because they are much larger than the local breeds you have to assist the females giving birth because the kids are much larger than the ones they are used to delivering. "But it's worth the initial hard work" says Taindonzwa. "I now have a thriving herd of strong, productive cross-breed goats and I have been passing on kids to my neighbours. My chickens are also thriving. The Boschveld hens mature quickly and lay lots of eggs. We are eating chicken and eggs regularly these days and the income from selling the chickens (USD40-50 per month) means that I can buy household items that I could not afford in the past".

The impact of the new crop production methods surprised Taindonzwa because her yields increased in the first season of using them. "I have very sandy soil so we used to use a lot of fertilisers in order to get any yields and that was an expense we could not afford. The sandy soil also dries out really quickly so in seasons when we don't get much rain, it's a serious problem because the crops wilt rapidly. The conservation agriculture and organic techniques have changed all of that. Now that I make planting basins the crops stay moist for much longer and we hardly use any fertiliser or manure because we are applying it directly to the planting basins".

"We didn't realise that the seeds of the melon could be sold to make cosmetic cream. Its actually a valuable crop and it grows very easily in our area".

Taindonzwa has particularly enjoyed growing Kalahari melon for the first time since she was introduced to the crop through BRACCT. Kalahari melon is indigenous and incredibly drought tolerant. It has been grown in the area for centuries, but mainly fed to cattle and eaten by a few people during times of drought.



Top photograph: Taindonzwa showing her improved poultry system. Bottom photograph: the Boer goat buck that she received through the BRACCT project



“We didn’t realise that the seeds of the melon could be sold to make cosmetic cream. Its actually a valuable crop and yet it grows very easily in our area”. The Kalahari melon production has to be completely organic as the buyer sells the seed as certified organic. After harvesting the melons, the flesh is removed and can be cooked and eaten or fed to livestock. The seeds are washed and dried in the shade. Then they are stored in a special organic storeroom, separate from other crops. Taindonzwa sold 3 buckets of seed in the first year of the project and made USD63. She has used the income from various project activities to buy roof sheets for her house and construct a better chicken house. She also wants to expand into fish farming, so she is saving money to build fishponds.

“The project has made a big impact in the community especially on those who are keen to learn new things. We got so much useful training and I wish that I could have attended more. I have been able to change the way I farm, even at my age. This knowledge will be passed on to others and that means that the whole community will continue to improve and one day hunger will be a thing of the past”.



Left: Taindonzwa demonstrating how to prepare crop planting stations using conservation agriculture. Above: Taindonzwa showing a Kalahari melon seedling



Small livestock successes

Sekai Mazarura is an enthusiastic farmer who lives with his wife and seven children in Joromani Village, ward 4, Mudzi. Before the BRAC project the family struggled to grow crops and got poor yields. “Often, we would harvest very little because droughts or dry spells killed the crops. The rainy season seems to be getting shorter and often the rain comes late, or we go for more than 30 days without a drop of rain in the middle of the growing season. Then when the rain arrives, it’s a downpour and sometimes our fields get waterlogged”. Lack of knowledge about which varieties to plant in such conditions was a major impediment for most farmers in the community. Since farming was the primary livelihood activity, no yields mean no income and no food. “It was really painful for me not to be able to provide for my family...not to be able to pay school fees for my kids,” says Sekai.

BRAC has expanded the horizons for the family and the community. Through training in climate smart agriculture, improved small livestock husbandry and commercial seed production; Sekai now has a broad range of income streams and food sources. This has shifted the family from a situation of barely making ends meet to being comfortable, covering expenses and being able to save money to invest back into the farm which is also helped by the ISAL group that Sekai belongs to.

Sekai Mazarura of Joromani Village, feeding his poultry with home-made feed which he learned to make through the BRAC project



Apart from sorghum, millet, maize and groundnuts, the family now grows rosella and Kalahari melon which give them an extra income boost at harvest time. Like Kalahari melon, rosella is a tough crop which needs little management or care. The plant produces flowers which are harvested and dried under shade. These are sold to buyers from Harare and used to make herbal teas and other products. Sekai also grows sorghum variety SV4 on contract for Champion seeds, an arrangement negotiated through BRAC.

Sekai and his wife showing some Kalahari melon seeds harvested last season

The rest of the sorghum and millet harvest surplus is delivered to a community silo, built through the project, near the Mazarura family home. “The community silo is very convenient because it means that the grain is protected from pests and diseases and buyers can come to a central place to collect the produce and pay the farmers”. Grain threshers have also been supplied by the project which takes the headache out of small grain processing. This makes small grain cultivation more popular among farmers. Small grains are more nutritious than maize and more climate-resilient.

“The community silo is very convenient because it means that the grain is protected from pests and diseases and buyers can come to a central place to collect the produce and pay the farmers”.

Livestock husbandry and breed improvement is another important aspect of BRAC. “Before my training with BRAC I did not really know much about livestock. I kept chickens and cattle plus a few goats, but they were not thriving. Disease was always a concern, and the animals would get out of condition during the long dry season making them weak and vulnerable to health problems. Through BRAC, I learned how to make better livestock housing and how to manufacture livestock feeds from crop residues and other local ingredients. I was also given a Boer goat buck and Boschveld chickens to improve my own breeds and I have passed the offspring on to my neighbours.” Boschvelds are very productive and tough birds but they don’t enjoy sitting on their eggs, so you have to use local hens as surrogate mothers to hatch the eggs. “Now I have got into a system of collecting the Boschveld eggs and putting them under my other hens. We have so many birds these days and we are eating eggs and chicken regularly as well as selling to our neighbours”. Sekai explains how his goats are also thriving. “Unlike local goats you have to look after the Boer-cross kids when they are young and make sure you give them the right vaccinations and worm treatments. But the price you get for selling a Boer goat is much



Sekai next to the community granary constructed at the local business centre through the BRAC project

higher than a local goat, USD 35-40 compared to USD25, so the cost of the medications is more than compensated for. The kids mature early and there is more meat on the adults". Sekai says that livestock is very important for farmers because it is a way to store wealth and in a volatile economic environment this is crucial. "When you need money, you can just sell a chicken or a goat and instantly get cash. You can also diversify your diet. We found out from training through BRAC that meat is a very nutritious source of food and especially important for children to eat meat regularly". The project has helped the family pay school fees and buy assets including farming equipment.

“People are less stressed out about money and drought,” says Sekai. “We are working together and sharing our knowledge and passing on the livestock”.

“Last season I sold nine, 50kg sacks of rosella at USD3 per kg and 98kg of Kalahari melon seed at USD1 per kg. So, I made USD368 which is a nice addition to the family income even though it is only once per year,” says Sekai. “But on average the income from all of the project activities works out at about USD 30-40 per month, which is significant for our essential needs”. Sekai says he has watched his community change as a result of the project. Through the goat and chicken pass-on schemes the livestock are becoming stronger and more productive. The supplementary livestock feeding that is being taken up by most community members means that there are far fewer livestock deaths, and this means community members have a reliable way to store and increase wealth, improve their diets and a safety net or insurance policy to cover them when times are tough. The community granary and group threshers have also increased small grain production in the ward. “People are less stressed out about money and drought,” says Sekai. “We are working together and sharing our knowledge and passing on the livestock”. It is clear that the project is bringing everyone together to share the burden of life in a tough part of the world.

Sekai and his wife inspect their maize for fall army worm which they have learnt to control through BRAC project training



Diversifying our livelihood saved our marriage

Life was difficult for 51-year-old Blessings Muzori and her family in Kazingizi Village, ward 17 in Mutoko. When the family farm began struggling, Blessings’s husband moved to the city to find work. “Things were hard” remembers Blessings, “we were living hand-to mouth and had to wait for provisions to be sent from my husband. This created a lot of conflicts between us. We were always fighting about the shortage of money, and I became suspicious that he had another family in the city. I found life really tough – doing everything on my own, trying to get something out of the land in such an unpredictable climate. When I managed to harvest something, I couldn’t get decent prices. We were at the point when we almost had to go out and beg for food from our neighbours”. Blessings saw similar situations befalling many of the people in her community. “Things were very difficult and painful, we didn’t have a good life,” she laments.

Blessings tells how things changed for herself and the wider community with the coming of the BRAC project. “BRAC opened our minds. One of the first things the project taught us was how to see the community and the land differently. We were taught about disaster risk management, and this helped us plan what we need to do in case of droughts and other challenges such as price fluctuations.

Blessings Muzori harvesting resurrection bush with members of the wild product harvesting group trained through the BRAC project

We also started to realise that the community had valuable resources beyond farming – the wild fruits and other products that could be collected and sold and were produced naturally without us having to put in any effort. The climate smart agriculture training made us realise we can use less fertilisers, farm without cattle to help us plough and still get a harvest even when the rainfall was low. We can also grow feed for our livestock in our fields and make hay for the cattle and goats. This was all completely new to us.”

“There are 14 people in our ISAL group and it’s like a family. We come together and save together. We have become a very strong group...”

Blessings has found the ISALs component one of the most exciting parts of the project. “There are 14 people in our ISAL group and it’s like a family. We come together and save together. We have become a very strong group and we usually raise about USD90 per month which is lent to group members. We charge 20% interest on the loan and share the interest equally. We discuss what projects to invest in and work together to achieve our group goals. The ISAL concept has helped us buy items and build things at our homes. We did not actually know each other before the project but since we formed the group, we have become best friends. We buy things in bulk together, including farming inputs and household items and that helps us save a lot of money. One of our most successful group projects has been poultry rearing. We buy the chicks together and different members do the rearing. We sell the birds and share the profits”.

Blessings estimates that the group have saved about USD800 including interest. The group put a proposal forward to the BRAC project to run an oil pressing business for sunflower, soya and peanut oil and they have just received the machinery. The group paid 30% and the project contributed 70%. The project has also helped the group secure a stand at the local business centre where they intend to build a permanent structure to house the press and run the business. Blessings estimates that the group will make at least USD200 per month from the business and she predicts that the business will boost production of more oil seed crops in the area.



Top: Blessings Muzori harvesting Zumbani. Bottom: packing the dried product into sacks in the organic store room.



Belssings and her sister processing sunflower oil using the group oil press.

The residue cake can be fed to livestock giving an added benefit from the business. Blessings also belongs to a group that harvests wild products from the forests and hills in the area. The group collects a wide range of products at different times of the year including resurrection bush (*Myrothamnus flabellifolius*) — a very drought tolerant plant which grows on the abundant rock outcrops in the area, and zumbani (*Lippia javanica*), a common plant in the area both of which fetch a high price from buyers as herbal teas. Blessings says that in the first year, when the rains were good, she made USD120 from harvesting these plants as well as wild fruits and nuts and selling them to buyers linked to the BRAC project.

“BRAC has strengthened peoples’ relationships and now we help each other more”.

Blessings’s husband has moved back to the rural home and is now an equal partner in all of the various activities. The couple are getting on very well and the family and community are much more positive about life in general. “BRAC has transformed me” extols Blessings, “I have my own money now and I am no longer continuously nagging my husband. I have dug a well and built a pot stand in the yard. I have bought two pigs and sold 16 piglets earning USD160. We no longer have quarrels in our house. We are doing these projects together. My husband is happy to be home and sharing the workload. He did not enjoy city life”. Blessings has found that her success has changed her position in the community. “People are always coming to me to ask for advice these days and I have been selected as a lead farmer to train others in the climate-smart methods taught to me by BRAC”. Blessings has also noticed the impacts on the wider community.

“Since BRAC came along, we are all much busier with our projects. This means less time for gossiping and telling tales. We visit each other in the fields and exchange ideas about new projects and farming methods. BRAC has strengthened peoples’ relationships and now we help each other more”. Many more ISAL groups have mushroomed as a result of inspiration from the project. Blessings estimates that there are at least 40 groups in their area alone.

Mastering leatherwork gives young women hope

Joymore Chiripanyanga is a young mother of three living with her husband in Mushimbo Village, ward 17, Mutoko. The couple began farming maize, groundnuts, Bambara nuts and vegetables as well as keeping some small livestock, but farming was not motivating because it constantly failed due to the effects of climate change. Joymore's husband is also a barber and when the farm was clearly struggling, Joymore began looking for something more lucrative to focus on. "We are not very good at farming, we don't have the knowledge or passion, our crops did not produce much, and our livestock kept dying because of diseases," Joymore explains. "We used to have to work on other peoples' farms as poorly paid labourers, just to put food on the table". All that changed when Joymore came across the BRAC project vocational training component which specifically targeted young people in the community.

Joymore Chiripanyanga making school shoes at Newlife Leatherworks a business set up by young people trained through BRAC project



Joymore using some of the shoe-making equipment supplied by the BRAC project

"The BRAC technical and vocational training project was announced at a meeting in our local business centre, and I was so excited when I heard about it", says Joymore. "I immediately signed up to train in leather work as it is something I have always wanted to get into but didn't know where to start!" Joymore explains that in most rural communities in Zimbabwe there are very few projects that would interest young people who tend to be less drawn to farming.

The vocational skills training was a real breath of fresh air for the young population. The training lasted three months with a trainer from Silveira House coming to the community and training groups of people who signed up for various different courses. Apart from the technical skills required for leather work, Joymore's group, called Newlife Leather Works, also learnt about leadership skills and how to run a business including costing, and marketing. "It was fun!" exclaims Joymore. "I enjoyed the training much more than I had learning at school. Level one was about learning how to make school shoes and womens' and mens' sandals. Level 2 involved learning how to make handbags, satchels, and other types of shoes. For level three, we learned how to make belts, wallets, and high cut shoes".

The leather workshop is busy, and the products are in high demand since it is the only business of its type in the area.

Joymore and some of the other group members have set up a leather work business at the local growth point with equipment (including sewing machines, a generator, scissors and hammers, a cutting knife, and a grinder) and materials supplied by the BRAC project. The leather workshop is busy, and the products are in high demand since it is the only business of its type in the area. "In the past, if people wanted to buy shoes or other leather products, they had to travel to Mutoko which is expensive," explains Joymore. Now they can order tailor made products which are cheaper and support local businesses. The shop also does a big trade in shoe repairs. Joymore says her favourite type of leatherwork is making school shoes, ladies' sandals and belts.



It takes about a day to make a pair of school shoes and although the work is quite difficult, she finds it interesting and challenging. Newlife Leather Works want to set up a formalised private limited company and secure contracts with retail outlets in the area. Each member of Joymore's group makes on average, USD30 per month from the business. "This is a nice addition to our household income and it has changed life at our home", says Joymore. "With the money saved from the business I built a kitchen and bought three more goats and more chickens. I also bought some new hair clippers for my husbands' barber business and a two-plate gas stove. I really enjoy going to work each day and my husband and my parents are so happy that I do this work. These days because both my husband and I have jobs, we share all of the household chores at home".

"BRACT has been very important for the young people in our community. We were getting left out of development projects but now we have something to be hopeful

Newlife
Leatherworks shop



Joymore is also a member of one of the ISALs set up by the BRACT project. There are 12 members in the group and each person makes about USD 40 per month from the scheme. Joymore has used the money to buy cooking pots, plates and a hosepipe. "BRACT has been very important for the young people in our community. We were getting left out of development projects but now we have something to be hopeful about. Apart from the skills we have learnt, BRACT has taught us how to work in groups, how to get on with each other and trust one another". Joymore says that in the past, because there was little that young people wanted to do, a lot of young men would spend most of the day drinking beer but the project has inspired people to work hard and set up their own businesses and have even become more interested in agriculture projects.

**Joymore and her children
displaying some of the items
that she has made**



Women can weld too

Netsai Kateera is a mother of three from Nhire village, ward 15, Mutoko. Before the BRACT project she and her husband made a living from farming and brick moulding, but life was tough. The unpredictable rains made trying to eke a living from the land extremely difficult and the family was struggling to pay fees to send their children to school. There were few buyers for the bricks and the couple were wondering how they were going to survive. "Sometimes we could not even feed the children or meet our day-to-day requirements," says Netsai.

She heard about the BRACT project during an announcement at a community gathering and immediately signed up for the vocational training programme. She was drawn to the idea of becoming a welder because she knew there was a need for metal workers in the community and she felt that it was a skill that she could easily acquire. "I believe in equal delegation of duties for men and women and my husband is in full support of my choice of occupation. The whole family is really happy with the extra income and my children are also interested in taking up the business when they finish school"

Netsai Kateera repairing a bicycle at Star Welding



The training began in 2017 and lasted three months. The first stage was learning about metal fabrication techniques - assemblage of parts, measuring, cutting, basic welding, grinding and painting. "There was a big emphasis on safety and at first some of the nine female trainees were afraid of trying out the more dangerous techniques, but they gained confidence and realised that they were just as good if not better than some of the male trainees.

"I believe in equal delegation of duties for men and women and my husband is in full support of my choice of occupation".

Netsai has teamed up with other graduates of the vocational skills training programme to set up a business called Star Welding. They rent premises at the local growth point and each group member earns on average about USD30 per month. "My favourite activity is making hoes. I enjoy all of the stages and I like the fact that I am making something that everyone in the community needs and wants to use because we are all farmers," laughs Netsai.



Top: Netsai with the scotchcart that she made. Right, assembling a door frame.





Netsai with some of the welding equipment supplied by the BRAC project

Apart from manufacturing a range of items including agricultural tools, window and door frames and even a scotch cart, a lot of the business at Star Welders consists of repairing items brought in by the community such as wheelbarrows and bicycles. "We are not the only welding business in town, but we get a lot of customers. People like coming to us because they know we will do a good job", Netsai explains.

When she is not welding, Netsai works on the family farm. "BRAC also taught us about climate smart agriculture. One of the most useful things was learning how to make bush meal and hay for our livestock from local materials. The hay is treated with urea to make it more palatable and nutritious. We have noticed a big improvement in the health of our cattle since we started feeding it to them". Netsai says she also found the conservation agriculture training useful and is now planting a wide range of crops instead of just maize. "Planting different crops means we get plenty of food and if one crop can't tolerate the drought or gets hit by pests and diseases, there are still plenty of others for us to eat and sell," Netsai explains. The family have also diversified into a range of small livestock on the advice of the BRAC project trainers. "We now grow lots of chickens and turkeys which means more meat in our meals, and we can also exchange them for goods. I recently paid for my child's extra maths lessons with some chickens."

Our business skills and our farming has improved. We have more food and income and can cope better as a community with the climate issues and economic situation".

Netsai also belongs to an ISAL group with 15 members. The group has a piggery project and recently sold some of the boars for USD1500 giving each group member a USD100 share of the profits. Netsai has used some of the money to pay for a funeral policy, she can pay her school fees on time and has used the welding income to make improvements to their house. "BRAC has helped our whole community in many ways," says Netsai. Our business skills and our farming has improved. We have more food and income and can cope better as a community with the climate issues and economic situation".

Leading by example

Jane Paeramanzi is a 45-year-old farmer from Nyamashuka village in Mutoko Ward 15, with a large, busy household including her husband, three adult children and five grandchildren. Before the BRAC project, the family only grew maize and groundnuts and raised a few indigenous chickens. "We did not know much about new farming techniques in those days. Our crops got infested by pests and were often destroyed by drought. We did not have enough money to buy decent fertiliser and good quality seed of different crops. Our diet was very monotonous and lacked variety" says Jane.

Jane's husband heard about the BRAC project and put her name down to train as a lead farmer. The training was conducted by experts brought in by the project including local agricultural extension officers. "I was qualified for the position because I can read and write well and I love teaching people," says Jane. "I was excited to learn all of the new climate smart agriculture techniques and pass the information on to others in my community. We learnt about conservation agriculture, small livestock production, methods of raising improved livestock breeds such as Boschveld chickens and Boer goats and how to make livestock fodder. After my training I set up demonstrations of all of the different techniques at my home and now I have a group of 65 farmers that I train two or three times per month". One of the main messages that Jane impresses on her group is the importance of diversifying crops to improve nutrition and yields.

Lead farmer, Jane Paeramanzi in her field of sugar beans



"I have learnt that if you have many crops, you have many options. If one fails, the others survive. It does mean more work and more labour, but it is worth it because of the many benefits of diverse cropping. Diversifying livestock is also important because you have an inflation-proof way of saving money and instant cash when you need it," says Jane.

"if you have many crops, you have many options. If one fails, the others survive. It does mean more work ... but it is worth it because of the many benefits of diverse cropping".

In terms of adoption of the techniques, she says that about 30% of her trainees practice all of the methods fully while the rest take up some of them to various degrees. Jane says that the hardest thing to convince people to do is mulching – covering the soil with dried grass or crop residues. Mulching can make a big difference in keeping the soil cool and moist, adding much needed organic matter to the soil and suppressing weeds but farmers are very resistant to doing it. "It's also difficult to get people to plant small grains," she says. "Apart from the labour in harvesting and processing, compared to maize, the crops are highly susceptible to attack by birds and this means people have to spend a lot of time chasing birds away from their fields if they want to get a decent harvest".

But Jane maintains that people in her area are slowly coming around to the ideas. If more people grow small grains there will be fewer issues of bird attacks and people can address the problem together as a community. Jane says that one of the most powerful ways of getting people to take on the ideas is when she shares her own testimony. "Even my own husband was sceptical when I started mulching our fields, but we did a comparison on yields between the mulched and un-mulched areas, and he had to admit that it was a highly effective method," Jane quips. Livestock production has also been a boost for the household. "The Boer goat buck that I was given has been very busy", laughs Jane. "He has been servicing does in five villages and has produced 120 offspring so far!" Her poultry are also thriving due to improved household and home-made feed that Jane was taught to make from her own products including lablab and velvet bean.



Top: Jane's family showing some of the goods they have bought from the ISAL profits. Bottom: Some of the products harvested from Jane's fields

Apart from the farming activities, Jane is also an active member of a vibrant ISAL group. "There were no ISAL groups in our community before BRAC and we had heard of successes in other communities, so we were really keen to try the system", says Jane. The BRAC trainers helped the community form strong groups through careful selection of members, leadership and governance training, constitution development and business skills. "Not anyone can be part of an ISAL group. You have to know and trust your group members well and everyone has to be prepared to work hard together." Jane emphasises. There are 30 members in Janes' group which is large for a typical ISAL. Because of its' size. the group has split into five sub-groups each focusing on different activities. Each member puts in USD50 per month and the money is loaned to group members that have put forward a request for a loan. The group charges 20% interest on the loans and shares the profits, a percentage of which is sometimes invested into group projects. The group clubs together to buy items in bulk which saves money. "We have used the money to buy household utensils, food, agricultural inputs and other basic items," says Jane. The BRAC project has really increased my standing in the community".

"BRAC has shown us that we, the community, have the solutions to our problems".

"People have seen how my home and my farm have been transformed and how successful I have become. These days we get many visitors asking my husband and myself for advice. One of the main lessons that I have learnt from BRAC, and that I pass on to others, is the importance of planning and preparing for future challenges that might arise. For example, it is really important to keep some of your crop surplus for the future, don't sell or consume everything, because you never know what problems are around the corner. Also, if you keep some of your produce aside you are more likely to be able to get a better price when stocks in the community are lower." Jane maintains that these kinds of principles have helped the whole community to become more resilient and self-sufficient. "Our motto has become "forwards ever, backwards never". As a community we were desperate, but BRAC has shown us that we, the community, have the solutions to our problems".

Jane proudly holds up of the most recent boer-cross offspring from the buck supplied by the BRAC project





Nyarai Zirugo weeding groundnuts with her mother and sisters

Empowered through knowledge

Nyarai Zirugo lives with her two children, her parents and her sisters in Njani village, ward 8, Mutoko. The family makes a living from a range of activities including field crop, horticulture and livestock farming, wild food collecting and vending. But things were not always so. “We were basically subsistence farmers before BRAC, living hand to mouth” says Nyarai. “We tried rearing broiler chickens for sale as well as selling our horticulture produce at Mbare market in Harare, but hyper-inflation killed our business as well as flooding of the market because many other people were growing and selling the same vegetables as us so the prices we were getting were very low”. The low rainfall meant that yields of field crops were barely enough to supply food to the family, and they rarely achieved a surplus. When the family tried planting small grains because of the climate change issues, the birds would destroy most of the crop.

“We never realised these wild fruits were so valuable,” says Nyarai. “In fact, we used to use the resurrection bush to make brooms!”

“One of the main things we got from BRAC was improved knowledge,” says Nyarai. We learned how to put in place measures to prepare for unpredictable situations. We realised that if we want to improve our lives, we can’t carry on in the same way as we had done in the past”. The first new venture for the family was wild product harvesting. They were taught by BIZ that the forests and hills around the homestead were filled with naturally occurring wild plants that could be harvested and sold for a high price. The family collects nhengeni fruit, marula and hacha nuts, zumbani and resurrection bush. They also grow moringa, Kalahari melon and rosella for sale. “We never realised these wild fruits were so valuable,” says Nyarai. “In fact, we used to use the resurrection bush to make brooms!”

BIZ taught the wild product harvesting trainees sustainable and hygienic methods to use as well as the correct processing and storage methods. Nyarai’s family constructed a shade cloth drier for processing and an organic store with support from the project. BIZ also taught the family how they can improve nutrition by consuming some of the wild products. We now make tea from resurrection bush, rosella and zumbani and we extract a delicious syrup from the hacha fruit when processing the seeds for sale. Sometimes we mix this syrup with rapoko meal and make a tasty cake called chimbwa. We are also making dried mangos as a result of the training,” explains Nyarai. “When we grow the Kalahari melon and extract the seed, we either feed the flesh to our pigs or we make it into a dish called nhopi where we add peanut butter to the cooked flesh and eat it as a sort of porridge”.

Two Harare-based private sector companies; Kaza Natural Oils and Hutano foods, come to the homestead once or twice a year to collect the products and pay the farmers. Last year the family made USD700 from the sale of six different products. BIZ also taught us the importance of looking after our environment if we want to make an income from it says Nyarai. “We have begun protecting the forests and if we see people causing unnecessary damage, we report them to the traditional leaders. We take action as a community to prevent wildfires and we also leave plenty of fruit on the trees to encourage natural regeneration and feed wild animals”. This income from wild harvested and climate-resilient products is truly climate smart because even in a poor rainy season the natural environment usually manages to produce something that can be eaten and sold.

The family also learnt about improved climate smart agriculture methods and have subsequently diversified their crops and livestock to grow a wider range of grains and legumes as well as practicing conservation agriculture techniques. These new methods have improved their livelihood sources and the diet of the family. Nyarai and her family have also joined an ISAL which has seven members. They each put in USD20 monthly and charge 20% interest on loans.

Nyarai shows the marula nut harvest from the entrance of the organic store constructed through the BRAC project





Nyarai feeding her livestock with home-formulated feed

With the proceeds they have bought groceries, plates, blankets and goats. Nyarai sums up the impact of the project on her family saying: "Since joining the BRACT project we have seen our livelihoods, diet and farming methods improve greatly. We are better able to sustain ourselves even when droughts hit our area".

Women are also becoming more independent and incidences of gender-based violence have been reduced.



Nyarai has also seen changes in the community. "People have adapted to the unpredictable climate by using the climate-smart farming methods and have food and economic security. There is less environmental destruction because we have realised that our natural resources are valuable. Women are also becoming more independent and incidences of gender-based violence have been reduced. Working in groups has also brought the community together, helping us learn how to work together. The community has been empowered through knowledge" concludes Nyarai.

Nyarai planting rosella seedlings with her mother and sisters

Getting to grips with unpredictable weather

Judgemore Kowo lives with his wife and two young children in Moyosvi village, ward 8, Mutoko. Before BRAC the family struggled to pay basic expenses because of persistent crop failure and diseased livestock. One of the particular challenges for the family is a dire lack of water at the homestead. "We have no boreholes in this area, and we barely have enough water to drink, let alone give to our animals and crops". Says Judgemore. "The rains used to start in October, but it is increasingly common for them to start in November or December and end in early March, which substantially reduces the growing season for crops". The BRAC project has helped Judgemore and his family look at their problems in a different light and realise that the solutions are in their hands. One of the most important tools for Judgemore was disaster risk reduction. "We learnt that to cope with drought and other challenges, we need to plan ahead. We have learnt to analyse our situation and identify the major risks that we could face, the frequency of these risks and the likely impacts. Then we come up with solutions and put them in place to reduce the impacts of potential problems."

Judgemore Kowo and his wife showing one of the waterharvesting pits they have dug in their field



Judgemore laughs and says "It was as if, in the past we were sitting under a huge rock that was about to fall on our heads but we were doing nothing to prevent it!" The project also taught farmers about the importance of managing their natural resources better because most of their livelihoods depend on these. Judgemore has been trained as a lead farmer and has put a number of demonstrations in place at his homestead including water-harvesting pits, conservation agriculture, mulching, and growing a wide range of different crop varieties. He uses these demonstrations to teach other farmers in his group. "The project gave me a petrol-powered brush-cutter which has helped me to collect a lot of mulch for my fields, as well as fodder for my livestock."

"We have learnt to analyse our situation and identify the major risks that we could face, the frequency of these risks and the likely impacts".

Judgemore was one of the recipients of a Boer goat buck and is building up his flock as well as passing on kids to others in the community. So far, the buck has produced 32 male offspring and 68 females. The improved goats fetch a high price in the community of up to USD80 compared to around USD35 for the indigenous Mashona goat breed. Judgemore recently sold three goats and bought an ox. "I improve my herd management by making hay which I use to supplement the animals feed during the dry season." Judgemore explains. "The project helped me to build a cement, hay-making mould which I use to demonstrate the correct methods of hay-making to other farmers. I also collect pods and leaves from local trees that I know the goats like to eat and I grind these into bush meal along with maize and sunflower".

Judgemore says another benefit from the project has been how it has improved the family diet. "We learned about the importance of good nutrition, especially for children. This has motivated us to consume a wide range of different foods including wild foods. We make healthy drinks for the children and do a lot of food processing and value addition to make sure that we have a variety of good food sources all year round. Because of the increased range of livestock that we are keeping including goats and chickens, we are eating a lot more meat and eggs than we used to."



Above: Judgemore's wife shows some of the newly-hatched Boscveld-cross chicks. Below: Judgemore demonstrates how to make a hay bale.



Judgemore belongs to a wild product harvesting group of 16 people that collect and grow a range of wild fruits and other products for sale. We have built a processing and storage area for the whole group and when the buyers come, we share the profits. He is also a member of an ISAL group which collects about USD15 per member each month and loans it at 5% interest. At the end of the year the group agrees to invest in a project which they do together. So far the group have bought pots, plates, blankets and chickens amongst many other items.

“We are proud of ourselves...Poverty is being reduced and our families are happier and healthier.”

Judgemore says the project has initiated a total transformation in the community. People are now collectively analysing their futures and looking at the community on a broad scale. “We are proud of ourselves,” he exclaims. “Poverty is being reduced and our families are happier and healthier.”

Judgemore in his kitchen displaying some of the many products being grown as a result of the BRAC project





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