



Addressing Root Causes

Stories of Change

May 2021

A Building Bridges in
Burundi and Nyubahiriza
Collaboration

In cooperation with:

Abatangamuco | ALM | La Benevolencija |

Biraturaba | CEJP | Centre Ubuntu | ERB |

Fecabu | Geste Humanaire |

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**American Friends
Service Committee**



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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

BBB	Building Bridges for Burundi
CLA	Cluster-Level Association
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
IP	Implementing Partner
LCGG	Local Committee for Good Governance (CLGP in French)
MSC	Most Significant Change
RTE	Real-Time Evaluation
SHG	Self-Help Groups
TJ	Transitional Justice
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
VSLA	Village Savings Loans Associations



“I learned that to live better ,
we should tell the truth
and dare to ask forgiveness.
[...] I understood that I could not continue
to carry the load, that I might foster peace
with my neighbors and to arrive at this stage
I must acknowledge my errors.”



“Today, peace and security reign in our colline.
Young people from different political parties
coexist peacefully and take care of
their country activities and their self-help groups.”



“I am closer to others and my self-esteem is increased.”

Background

The Nyubahiriza and Building Bridges in Burundi (BBB) programs are funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs under the Addressing Root Causes of Conflicts Fund (ARC).¹ Implemented in Burundi, both programs aimed to promote social cohesion, human security, youth's resilience, and informal and transitional justice.

The Nyubahiriza program was implemented by a consortium consisting of Oxfam-Novib, CARE, Impunity Watch, and local implementing partners until October 2020. The BBB program is carried out by another consortium Help a Child (Red een Kind), and including Cord, Mensen met een Missie, the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), and several local partners. Implemented since 2016, the BBB program will run until November 2021.

The two programs work with partners, communities and authorities from the local to the national level in order to generate a number of necessary changes to allow Burundians to live more peacefully with less fear and intimidation (ARC Result Area 1: Human Security), to manage conflict peacefully and deal with the legacies of a violent past (ARC Result Area 2: Rule of Law), and to become more resilient not only socially but also economically (ARC Result Area 4.1: Livelihoods). Indeed, the two ARC programs work on “promoting social cohesion, human security, and resilience of the Burundian youths and of the local communities,” notably through socioeconomic resilience and transitional justice, and in two common intervention provinces, Bujumbura Rurale and Cibitoke.

As part of the program's collaborative efforts, from February to March 2020, BBB and Nyubahiriza used a qualitative methodology to collect stories of change across seven provinces – Kirundo, Cibitoke, Bujumbura Mairie, Bujumbura Rurale, Rutana, Makamba, and Muhingya. The stories collected from community members illustrated changes in the communities that contributed to reduced conflict and improved socio-economic stability. Furthermore, the stories illustrated how program participants feel about protecting, respecting, and fulfilling their rights, and their perceptions and hopes regarding the future.

The data were gathered before electoral period so that the two programs could measure change made before this crucial period, and then the change would be measured after that period also to see if the election could influence or change some results. This learning paper is a result of collaborative effort, combining our findings to showcase synergies and complementary efforts for sustainable change in Burundi.

¹ The ARC Fund is aimed at tackling the root causes of armed conflict, instability, and irregular migration. The fund constitutes around 20% of the total Dutch aid spending on SROL and is therefore a significant priority for the MFA. In total, 19 ARC partner organizations are working on 21 programs in 12 countries for a 5-year period (2016-2021).

Methodology

■ Real-Time Evaluation (RTE) Training

At the end of January 2020, program staff and implementing partners of BBB and Nyubahiriza attended a two-day training on the real-time evaluation, inclusive of conflict sensitivity training and introductions to the story of change methodology.

In March 2020 ahead of the presidential election in Burundi, the Nyubahiriza program conducted a real-time evaluation (RTE) and invited the BBB consortium to undergo the data collection together. Given the rapidness of this evaluation, a modified version of the Most Significant Change (MSC) technique² was selected to gather the qualitative data, emphasizing on the learning and process of change while also capturing unintended consequences or changes. To increase effectiveness and build on the Oxfam/BBB collaboration, Oxfam invited BBB to a training on the story of change methodology with the view to combine qualitative analysis later in 2020 for learning and triangulating data of the two ARC programs.

During the workshop, the importance of agreeing key terms and definitions was continually emphasized by participants. Data collectors must understand key terms within the project (i.e., transitional justice, youth empowerment, social cohesion) to enable them to re-word questions and facilitate interviews in the right direction. This can be drawn from the workshop exercise where participants wrote down words associated with key terms (e.g. transitional justice, youth empowerment, social cohesion). Also emphasized during the workshop was active listening and engaging with the storyteller during the story collection process. It is important to note that within the workshop, some participants, mostly INGO members, were a little nervous of the safety of data collectors and it was emphasized that their safety is paramount to the entire process.

■ Data Collection

Stories were collected from 153 individuals living across the seven provinces—Kirundo, Cibitoke, Bujumbura Mairie, Bujumbura Rurale, Rutana, Makamba, and Muhingya—guided by the questions below:

1. How would you describe your current situation regarding security, safety, economic resilience, livelihoods and youth employment in the community, access to justice?
2. What main changes have you noticed in relation to security, safety, economic resilience and youth employment, access to justice in the community in the last year? This can be either a positive or a negative change.

² Davies, Rick and Jess Dart, "The Most Significant Change Technique," 2005

3. We have been talking about a number of changes (note to interviewer: refer to list above).
From your point of view, which do you think is the MOST significant change?

Why did you choose this change in particular? In other words, why is it the most significant for you?

4. How did this most significant change come about?
5. Now that you are where you are, what can you do to get a positive change or sustain the positive change?
6. What could my organization do to support you in this?
7. What title do you want to give to your story?

■ Method of Analysis

The analysis of the stories focused on the question of sustainability: to what extent has the ARC Burundi program resulted in sustainable outcomes for people from community structure response & authorities in guaranteeing security, and resilience against political/identity-based manipulation? How did these changes come about and what can we learn from this?

The key steps to analyzing the stories included data cleaning, translation, coding, triangulating, and consolidating everything in narrative form. The steps are described in the table below.

TABLE 1: ANALYSIS OF STORIES COLLECTED

Steps	Quantitative	Qualitative
Systemizing	Consolidating on SPSS (Oxfam)	Consolidating on Excel
Data cleaning	Checking for lack of clarity, misunderstood questions, missing answers, anomalies in the data e.g. too high/low numbers etc.	
Translating	Externally or use in-house translation	
Coding	See table below.	
Triangulating	Cross-check quantitative and qualitative findings against the evaluation questions and against the intended project outcomes; do they reinforce each other or contradict? Are we missing any key information? Are there any unexpected findings not in line with our intended outcomes? Triangulate against BBB findings and 2019 annual report.	
Narrative	Formulate key trends and findings against the above evaluation questions and map the findings against the project outcomes.	

Coding

The table below guides analysis, firstly by suggesting questions from the quantitative and qualitative surveys that relate to the overall evaluation questions, then followed by suggested coding areas. These coding areas were used as lens for analysis. For example, highlighting outcomes that respondents have mentioned that are positive or appear sustainable in one color or highlight all outcomes that beneficiaries mentioned that appear to have some weaknesses in another color. This is primarily applicable to qualitative data as quantitative data can be analyzed using SPSS. Note that due to logistical and capacity reasons, BBB did not use SPSS for coding.

TABLE 2 CODING GUIDELINES AND NOTES

Survey Questions			
	Quantitative	Qualitative	Coding
What parts of the program can/cannot be considered sustainable? (relating to activities, outputs, outcomes)	<p>Using SPSS, analyze all survey responses with this question in mind. Which areas (e.g. collaboration, roles, or disputes) do respondents consider having improved or not?</p> <p>Other key questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will you continue your role (or income generation activities) after the project has finished? (collate the roles in a graph, who said yes/no) Do you have a role in resolving conflict in the community? [Yes/No] Has this changed since 	<p>What main changes have you noticed in relation to security, safety, economic resilience and youth employment, access to justice in the community in the last year? This can be either a positive or a negative change.</p> <p>We have been talking about several changes (<i>note to interviewer: refer to list above</i>). From your point of view, which do you think is the MOST significant change?</p> <p>Why did you choose this change in particular? In other words, why is it the most significant for you?</p>	<p>Code findings based on strengths (sustainable), weakness (not sustainable), then sub-code by:</p> <p>Activity, Output, Outcome (then by outcome area)</p>

	<p>you received the training? If yes, in what way?</p> <p>All GENERAL Questions – particularly do they anticipate any of it will change as an indicator of sustainability.</p>		
<p>What may affect the sustainability of these activities, outputs, or outcomes? (e.g. external or contextual factors)</p>	<p>What is needed to continue your role successfully?</p> <p>What would stop you continuing this role?</p>	<p>Now that you are where you are, what can you do to get a positive change or sustain the positive change?</p> <p>What could my organization do to support you in this?</p>	
<p>How did the outcomes take place?</p>	n/a	<p>How did this most significant change come about?</p>	<p>Code against the ARC Framework outcome areas (categorize based on which outcome area they might fit under – and thus quantify e.g. 5 stories appear under Outcome area 1.).</p>

■ Limitations of the Stories and Analysis

The collection of stories and analysis did not follow the traditional process of the Most Significant Change (MSC) methodology. The team involved was able to document personal accounts of change at the outcome level and ask storytellers which of these accounts is the most significant. However, a critical analysis made as a group (comprised of BBB/Oxfam staff, leadership, partners, participants, and others) of why these stories were the most significant was not carried out for a variety of logistical reasons, mainly due to the 2020 presidential elections that put communities at standby for security reasons and the start of the Covid-19 pandemic which interrupted plans for follow-up and shifted priorities to responding to community health needs.

In any case, stories collected have illustrated how and when changes have happened in the communities. The stories provided information about change in the lives of the program participants, intended or unintended, positive, or negative, clarifying primarily the values held by program participants. The MSC tool contributed to measuring change, but it was not always possible to connect the tool to any indicator, as the change can only be defined once the stories are written and the most significant ones were selected.

There was no time to validate the data collected and to conduct a robust triangulation in the findings that both consortia collected. Moving forward, it is recommended that monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) officers or point persons within the country office across projects meet regularly to document data cross-over and challenges. Further, issues of bias, truth, and perception need to be monitored as part of this RTE and any future evaluations.

■ Quality of Stories

As noted by the joint BBB and Oxfam team right after field work, stories related to economic resilience and trauma were easy to collect. However, stories on community reconciliation cannot be classified as stories of success or failure. Reconciliation is a process. So far, with activities implemented for community-based reconciliation (in the new strategy) namely dialogue and theatre, victims are ready to forgive, but the other party is not necessarily aware of the process, or does not even want to participate in the BBB reconciliation process. These stories are incomplete, readers are likely to raise more questions. No or very few success and failure stories to collect on community reconciliation as of now. Also, precision is easy in economic resilience stories while it is just an estimation for other stories.

Another nuance is on peaceful conflict resolution. For mediators and paralegals, all satisfactorily solved conflicts are success stories and some of them are serving as model for other people who are in conflict. However, for long-term conflicts, which meanwhile may have caused trauma or not,

lasting solutions become a remedy. And then becomes a good story to tell. It also seems that the person or the party who has formulated the mediation request is the one with a story though may not be a generalized. Moreover, so-called success stories on social cohesion turned out to be stories on trauma.

Findings

■ Summary of findings

Findings discussed in this paper are based on top-line analysis from a real-time evaluation conducted in March 2020. This RTE was triggered to gather early insights into the sustainability of project outcomes for the people, community structures and authorities in guaranteeing security and resilience against political manipulation ahead of the elections. Coupled with the arrival of COVID-19, it was anticipated that any sustainable positive change will need to be strengthened and therefore data gathered would allow for adaptive programming as well as provide the final evaluation with preliminary findings to inform scope and priorities and lessons learned for future peace-building project development.

The table below provides a snapshot of the most significant changes as identified by participants. The percentages are accumulated based on qualitative coding and should be interpreted as an insight into where significant change is happening across the consortia with a view of validating this data at the final evaluation process.



Domains of Change	BBB	Nyubahiriza
Social cohesion and conflict management (external and household dynamics)	35%	33%
Increased economic resilience and access to income	30%	25%
Forgiveness and reconciliation through transformative justice processes	18%	10%
Trauma healing	10%	N/A

Examples of positive significant changes mentioned:

- Less inclination to participate in harmful activities (i.e., forced prostitution, illegal drug use, alcoholism, stealing) due to improved household economic conditions and access to income, savings, and loans.
- Improved access to meaningful employment and business ventures.
- Even if there is still lingering discomfort with people from different ethnic groups, community members see possible reconciliation through the work of mediators and through forgiveness.
- Shift in household-level gender dynamics; the elevation of women taking a more active household leadership role.
- A heightened perception of peace and safety.
- Shift in thinking that different groups are bad and increased respect for human rights overall.
- Observation that there is less immigration to Tanzania.
- Mental health being valued and restored; trauma healing being available to communities.
- Greater collaboration with local authorities

Other issues that remain that community members say have not improved (no change or negative change):

- Biases in the legal system that still exist.
- Despite improvement in job prospects and access to income, community members expressed that pervasive market instability across the country still means prices for food and other essentials remain too high.
- Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on progress made on income-generating activities, small business, and security.
- Worries about climate change and its impact on agriculture and crops.
- Access to formal justice remains expensive and not seen as a smart method of resolving conflicts (note that BBB does not work in the formal justice structures).
- Unemployment rates across the country remain high leading to young people wasting their skills on small jobs while waiting for more promising opportunities.

■ Increased social cohesion at home and in the communities

A large percentage (87%) of respondents reported they have observed a reduction of violent conflict in the community when we compare with the results of 2018. The youth supported by BBB program is composed with youth of different ethnic groups, different religious groups, and different political parties. Trust and cooperation between members of community enhanced due intervention of the Burundi ARC Program.

Both BBB and Nyubahiriza have encouraged youth and communities from various socio-political and ethnic affiliations to be exposed to each other and debate topics that concern their communities such as security, solidarity, conflict transformation, gender justice and others. For BBB through, self-help groups (SHGs) and Cluster-Level Associations (CLAs) and for Nyubahiriza through peace clubs and VSLAs (village saving loan associations). CLAs are community structures that provide coaching and mentorship for members of SHGs and review their progress to create linkages with the market and established entrepreneurs. The BBB 2019 annual report emphasized the role that SHGs and CLAs played in strengthening relations between individuals (including

domestic relationships) and groups in the community complemented by other actors activated by the program such as mediators, paralegals, local community reconciliation actors, agents for transitional justice, psychologists focused on trauma healing, and others.

Stories collected in 2020 reflect the causal link between improved access to income to enhanced social cohesion, including decreased disputes and conflicts at household and community levels, and the role that young men and women supported by the program played in promoting peacebuilding and conflict prevention.

Examples of decreased disputes and conflicts

A decrease in disputes and conflicts relating to household, land, water, and disputes centered around ethnicity and politics. "I had a brother with whom we never agreed on inheritance (the borders that divided our plots) but the people of Nyubarihiza reconciled us and we shared the plots well. Everyone respects the plots of others now." (Nyubahiriza, male, Muyinga).

Decreased disputes

In relation to political parties, participants report increased respect, perceived resistance to manipulation and support. Disputes have reportedly decreased relating to political parties: "The project taught us how to go about the election period on how to do it without hurting others, that our differences on the choice of political party does not make us enemies." (Nyubahiriza, female, Muyinga)

Stability

"Today, peace and security reign in our colline. Young people from different political parties coexist peacefully and take care of their country activities and their self-help groups. Many young people from self-help groups have invested in agri-livestock, in small businesses and in small trades existing in our locality. Young people are stable, the sources of funding and the potential for young people are increasing. Young people banish all forms of distraction forever, they are concerned about their business. Self-help groups and Cluster Level Associations contribute significantly to the peaceful resolution of conflicts." (BBB, male, Kirundo)

Trusting neighbors

Interactions with neighbors are now reportedly shaped by empathy and support with one participant stating, 'it is as if it is you who has a problem (Nyubahiriza, Male, Muyinga)'. This extends to trusting neighbors with money and business-related matters. "Even before a neighbor couldn't lend you money because he couldn't see how you could pay it back, but if he took the risk of lending you the money you want, you had to pay him back twice the money and a little time he was stressing you all the time'.

Acceptance of differences

Many other examples of how neighborly interactions have improved were provided and are a good proxy indication for social acceptance of community differences. This even extends to religion, with one participant stating that 'We have been taught we can go to church when we want and



can change religion as we want regardless of our differences we must be together and support each other’.

Examples of Youth Responding to Inter-community Tensions

Stories collected demonstrated some ways that youth in the communities have engaged in dialogue or taken the lead to mediate or diffuse potential conflicts.

- The current situation in terms of social cohesion is good because there is mutual assistance between the beneficiaries of the program via SHGs and social assistance via CLA between (BBB, male, Kirundo).
- Being part of the BBB program has also improved our social status, and how we are considered in the community as the youth, therefore, when we need access to justice, or even to the local administration, we are considered as honest serious members of the community, and not the stubborn youths (BBB, male, Kirundo).
- Moreover, they (youth) are active in the development of their community by helping even other very vulnerable people in the communities. Apart from the trainings related to the SHG approach and the trainings related to social cohesion that THARS gave us, I came to understand that not all people are bad as I used to think (BBB, female, Makamba).

- With the arrival of the BBB program in our community, the problems started reducing, issues such as idleness of the youth and domestic violence have really reduced. For me on a personal level, the BBB program allowed me not to have to be asking for everything to my husband as a wife, am able to also participate in the wellness of my family, we have access to better healthcare, we have improved our lifestyle as a family, and we can have access to better nutrition. Moreover, we have APS in our groups who help us to resolve peacefully our conflicts (BBB, female, Kirundo).

Examples of Improved Household Dynamics

Improved relations within the fabric of the household and the relations between men and women were frequently reported within the qualitative RTE data, these include:

- Increased understanding of the importance of legal marriage.
- Increased forgiveness and understanding within the personal relations between men and women. One man in Kirundo said his wife's alcohol consumption had adversely impacted their marriage. But a mediator through the BBB program helped them find "perfect harmony" again. "The mediators showed the merits of a balanced family and exposed the function of man and woman in the household. They highlighted the harms of alcohol to the health of mother and child and especially the family economy. They also told the complementarity between man and woman from the point of view of the well-being of the family and respect for the common good in the family."
- Reduction of household and family disputes and as a result increased consultative household dialogue between men and women "Today a man asks his wife advice on selling property and other assets."
- Participants report a move to actively fight against polygamy, particularly recognizing it brings problems for children and reduces the ability for husbands to financially support their wives. "We have advised men and shown them the bad consequences of polygamy one of its consequences is that children are almost always victims". For those who did not understand the strategy of looking after them were adopted, if we found a man in the house who is not his own with the wife of others, we would bring him to authority and he would pay the almond. We've made men aware of legal marriages. Here there were in the houses, in the fields, we chose the people who must watch in the evening, we take the turn. The flight is reduced to almost 80%".

Marriage registration

According to some participants, disputes in households were often caused by the fact that men did not want to legally register their wives which led to a lack of support and rights for women and children often perpetuated by polygamy. To this end, BBB and Nyubahiriza began to tackle the root causes of household level conflict and through training/increased awareness, demonstrated the positive impact of registering your wife.

Discretion leading to trust

One participant reported that "before, when a couple bickered, they went directly to the hill chief, and their problem became public. This made it impossible for this man to reach an agreement

between this man and this woman. But now, with the peace clubs, the conflicts between spouses are secret. We (peace clubs) must keep the problems solved in couples' secret. It strengthens their confidence in us."

Space for dialogue

The peace clubs have addressed sensitive household relations in a private manner that increased confidence and trust in their approach. The project proactively invited members of the community to attend and discuss these topics where no space for this dialogue existed previously. Leading to self-reflection and sustainable change in the form of getting their wives registered in the communes. There has been quite some transformative change reported; from reported beating and disrespecting wives to then actively promoting the project and including wives in decision making.

Ease conflict

A respondent cited psychosocial support from BBB in helping ease conflict at home. "Mageyo at home (in Mubimbi Commune, Bujumbura Province), the disputes in the households decreased and this thanks to the work of the Psychosocial assistants."

Prevention of gender based violence

As disputes and conflicts in households can be source of trauma, psychosocial assistants worked on preventive activities through raising awareness of the people to eradicate gender-based violence in their community.

Repairing the fabric of the household

A general observation within the data reveals unity building in the household, with husbands and wives collectively joining the project and passing on teachings to other household as exemplary families. Further including reconciliation with children and repairing the fabric of the household for future generations. Training and awareness raising are frequently referenced by participants as means of enabling constructive dialogue and realizing a more informed community on matters of conflict resolution.

■ Women's participation and empowerment

Respondents frequently report perceived change in women's participation in the household and community with women citing they have increased say in household-level decision making, including selling property. "Now the wife has a word in her home, before a husband did not need his wife's consent to sell the property of the house, he did not rely on his wife's opinion on any decision regarding the family."

Women's rights

Women have an increased understanding of their rights in the household decision making process: "No men are betting or using family money for games. Women used to sacrifice for their children

and not for eating, we were always searching for school fees. Women now understand they have a right to participate in their home lives and projects."

Trading women

Women's increased role and interest in trade and small business. "It was difficult to convince men, to tell them they had to work, but they came to understand"; "The way of life of women has changed because they can trade through VSL, buy plots and some material needs of the house without appealing to their husbands."

Less fear and resistance

These changes are against the backdrop of men's fear and resistance to women's participation "they [men] believed that we would revolt against them once they were financially independent".

Shifting norms and attitudes

Many examples of men and women demonstrate a shift in norms and attitudes at the household level, in particular perceived change that men now value women's role and participation in household decision making. There appears to be, amongst this sample of participants, a general acceptance that women can contribute economically to household income.

Peace clubs and alliances

Participants referencing women's increased participation often refer to the learning or training provided by the Nyubahiriza program, either peace clubs or the Abatangamuco. Attending peace clubs specifically and training appear to have elevated women into associations and alliances that legitimized their place in the household; supported by increased awareness for men. This combination of activities has not been verified as successful within the scope of this evaluation. However to what extent men attended training and encouraged their wives, or wives attended training and encouraged their husbands or both attended together is not clear and may be something worth exploring for future peacebuilding projects in terms of targeting key influencers and household mediators.

Increased problems at household level

Regarding sustainability, the data reveals a general commitment from women to maintain their roles and a recognized need to share their experiences. A woman from Kirundo Province expressed, "With the arrival of the BBB program in our community, the problems started reducing; issues such as poverty, idleness of the youth, and domestic violence have really reduced. For me on a personal level, the BBB program allowed me not to have to be asking for everything to my husband as a wife, I am able to also participate in the wellness of my family, we have access to better healthcare, we have improved our lifestyle as a family, and we can have access to better nutrition."

Unity of empowerment

Where husbands and wives have both participated in the program, there is reference to becoming

role models which suggests a unity of empowerment and possible sustainability in messaging. To what extent women's participation and enabled empowered in the household, community and beyond is highly dependent on access to capital, resources, and ongoing local networks/alliances. What is not clear, is to what extent household level shifts have been influenced and extended to community level and beyond.

■ Improved Economic Resilience

The 2019 BBB annual report provided numbers that support how the program contributed to the reduction of conflicts, instability, and irregular migration. In terms of economic resilience, 17,463 young people from various ethnic and political backgrounds made up close to 896 SHGs and 1,226 youth making up 80 CLAs. These youth have increased and diversified their income-generating initiatives to improve economic and social resilience in their communities. Those involved in vocational training increased their average monthly income tremendously from 23,636 BIF (115 Euros) before training to 117,684 BIF (57.4 Euros) after training.

Creation of income

A large percentage of respondents identified that the most significant change in their lives was about economic resilience and youth employment in the community. One male respondent in Kirundo said:

We noticed that in our community there is more security in the sense that there is less idleness, and also the issues that used to result into violence such as alcohol abuse, marital issues, stealing due to poverty have reduced in the youth thanks to the BBB program. Also, the BBB structure has helped us to resolve conflicts at the basic level of the group, in most cases. Through the activities, I can see that the youth in our community such as myself, have learned to be economically resilient. One of the things that I have personally learned is that the solution to our problems is found in our hard work, we can still create our income and find solutions to our problems. I chose this change because on my personal level, I felt like the lack of resources was one of the main root causes of the vices amongst the youth in our community, it is where the idleness was starting, and led to other useless activities.



Other program participants described how improved economic conditions have contributed to community resilience and financial stability including being more hopeful for the future. SHG and VSLA members cited paying off debts and taking out loans in more transparent ways instead of selling what they can to fund the need for assets. With manageable interest rates, access to loans have meant community members have been able to buy animals, build their own houses, open small businesses such as hair salons, trade fruits and vegetable, pay their children's school fees, and others. There has also been a shift in focus to livelihoods and new interests in trade as well as lessons in saving money. Formerly unemployed youth have even become employers generating opportunities for their peers. Respondents observed that youth delinquency has declined and through supportive alliances in VSLAs and SHGs, relationships in the households and communities have improved as well.

Improvement through economic opportunities and access

Here are some ways program participants have described this improvement in their households and communities due to improved economic opportunities and access:

- I was a worthless man who abused his wife, who spent all the family's money on alcohol. But today I'm a better man. We have formed two groups in VSLA, that of adults and young people. We started saving, the young people made plans, they buy crops and fruits and sell them on the market. They save the profit (male, Muyinga).
- The young people find employment in this period to have money to invest in their business and to save in their SHGs (female, Kirundo).
- I can save and access loans that will allow me to invest and create an income for myself, reducing poverty and conflicts in the community (female, Kirundo).
- The young members of SHGs have developed the sense of empowerment by initiating small income-generating activities such as the small trade in salt, avocados, local banana beer or sorghum (female, Rutana).
- Concerning the economic side, young people are now autonomous thanks to skills they received from BBB Program via Biraturaba and Kaz'O'zah Keza partners regarding entrepreneurship. For me for instance, thanks to the knowledge I received in relation with entrepreneurship but also given the fact that I am a member of a SHG through the BBB program, I am able to meet my needs and I was able to buy three goats and I also have chickens. Apart from that, I earn my living by making sandals using knowledge learned at Biraturaba and Kaz'O'zah Keza (male, Makamba).
- Before BBB came, I was living on a day to day basis, and I did not think I could have hope for a better future. Now, with the trainings received and the implementation and taking actions in different business activities, I later invested in livestock, in land and I am hopeful I will still invest and grow (female, Kirundo).
- Financially, I get the bulk of the income in agribusiness, tailoring and small business (small shop) (female, Kirundo).
- In the community, we observe several young people who develop a lot of IGAs and microenterprises which go hand in hand with job creation, which greatly reduces unemployment among young people. Today, if cases of disputes arise, young people confide in the first place with SHGs, then CLAs and Local Committee for Participatory Governance ultimately, which further facilitates administration (female, Kirundo).
- Personally, the changes I have noticed is that I am now able to have access to better nutrition and better clothing (male, Cibitoke).
- In terms of livelihoods, during the short growing season, the population did not harvest following heavy rains that swept away the potato and bean crops and there was famine, but no one took the road to Tanzania (male, Rutana).
- For me on a personal level, the BBB program allowed me not to have to be asking for everything to my husband as a wife. I can also participate in the wellness of my family, we have access to better healthcare, we have improved our lifestyle as a family, and we can have access to better nutrition. Moreover, we have psychosocial support agents (APS) in our groups who help us to resolve peacefully our conflicts (female, Kirundo).

Peace clubs as enabling environment

Many participants once again refer to the training and teachings provided by peace club members, demonstrating harmful consequences of delinquency, beer consumption and other harmful behaviors. The peace clubs appear to have become an enabling environment for change, where informal alliances and friendships can be built and social support can be sought where trauma causes drinking or other outlets, as one participant states, "People investing in different areas, even young people no longer have time to waste with unimportant stories, unemployment tends to disappear as people focus more on trade and poverty decreases significantly."

Accessible way to save and borrow

Previously, when taking out loans or borrowing money within the community, debt repayment was done with interest equal to half the loan. The programs provided a more accessible way to save and borrow at low interest rates coupled with entrepreneurship training. One man in Muyinga states, "I started saving first and then I applied for a loan and in this loan I bought a goat, it multiplied after three, I paid my debt and I asked again the loan to trade the beers." This certain example demonstrates the multiplier effect of how taking out his first loan led to further businesses. A possible sign of the sustainability of the VSLA approach.

Confidence in lending

Furthermore, participation in the project appears to have given others confidence in lending and borrowing money between community members. The project has given legitimacy to the individuals again even when they made past mistakes. Also addressing the fear of not being able to repay. It is not clear whether the issue of not being able to pay back loans was a contributing factor in local conflict.

Savings

A woman in Muyinga stated that "we were taught how to save, how to undertake development projects. Now I save every Friday. Then after a specific deadline, I withdraw and buy manure for my field. Women are now self-reliant, less asking men for money." This is an example of how the VSLA project has also taught women how to save which has enabled women's participation and contribution to the household and community economies.

Organized

A participant from SHG in Rutana confirms that: "Currently, the situation changed among the youth because we became responsible for ourselves and the community in which I live has no difficulty economically. In need of food, the population is organized and receives food without

difficulty". It means that the community has already improved their living conditions related to the nutrition because from loans received in SHG, they invest in agriculture to feed their families.

■ Collaboration with local government for community development and civic engagement

There are complex and sensitive governance issues across Burundi. Both the Nyubahuriza and BBB programs worked with local authorities through peace clubs and local committee for good governance (LCGG or CLGP in its French acronym) members. These clubs and committees are intended to bridge the gap between communities and local authorities with the idea of building social cohesion and increasing the voices of the marginalized in decision making. As of 2019, BBB supports 180 LCGG members who are trained on the principles of good governance and municipal law.

Conflict resolution

CLAs, LCGGs and peace clubs have contributed to building community development and peace and security plans with local authorities towards greater sustainability. CLA members contribute in conflict resolution arisen in SHGs, for example some SHG members refuse to reimburse the loans, and due to the good collaboration with local authorities, conflicts are resolved.

Increased civic responsibility

A single mother in Bujumbura Mairie cited "increased civic responsibility, characterized by the awareness of citizens regarding their duties and the defense of their rights" as the most important aspect she has learned and what has catalyzed changes in her life after participating in BBB activities. "I chose this change because the population plays a very important role in the life of their community when well-sensitized. I am raising my children alone following my husband's unexpected departure. It was in April 2015 that my husband took off without saying goodbye, leaving me in extreme poverty with four children in my care. On my own, I found myself unable to support my family and began to prostitute myself hoping to earn money to support my children. Unfortunately, the clients didn't pay me often and sometimes some of them would rape me. In May 2019, she was introduced to a self-help group during a public meeting at the Musaga market by members of the LCGG. But because she was over 25 years old, the LCGG led her to join a community-based solidarity group that supply fruits and vegetables from the countryside to various markets in the city.

"Today I rent a small house in which I sell my fruits and vegetables. I was able to buy four goats, ten laying hens and my children all go to school without worrying about the school fees, enough to

dress and feed. I thank the members of the CLGP Musaga very much who enlightened me to go further and to come up with this work that allows me to improve my living conditions.”

Gentleness

Another respondent expressed said, “The community is peaceful, the young people are gentle and calm. The various conflicts that arise are resolved by the CLAs in collaboration with Local Committee for Good Governance.” He wanted to show that the conflict in their community are resolved thanks to the better collaboration with local authorities and they are quiet because problems are managed jointly with all community member.

Improvement of relationships

Similarly, in Nyubahiriza, where local authorities are mentioned, participants state a general sense of improvement in the relationship. Particularly where peace clubs have enabled stronger roles and links between communities and authorities. One respondent said that “drunkenness, fighting and cohabitation have diminished. These are settled first by the peace clubs. Only if one of the parties to the conflict is not satisfied with the verdict can he go to the local authorities.” This suggests peace clubs have adopted an informal first step in conflict mediation without the need to involve local authorities. Another participant stated that “local authorities are no longer overburdened by conflicts.”

■ Trauma healing, psychosocial support, and forgiveness

Ten percent of the stories collected by BBB cited trauma healing and psychosocial support as the most significant change in their lives. Members of CLAs, in collaboration with psychosocial support actors (APS), psychologists, local community Reconciliation Agents (LCRA/ALRC) and Transitional Justice Focal Points, lead community dialogue events on reconciliation, trauma healing workshops and counselling, group therapy meetings as well as social sports and cultural events. Overall, CLAs have increased commitment from youth towards promoting peaceful coexistence, tolerance, trauma healing and conflict prevention.

Inner peace

One woman from Bujumbura Mairie described the change in her life with the following story: “Before I received the BBB program especially this psychosocial assistance, I was always nervous and feeling sick to my stomach. In the past, I couldn't sleep. When I went to bed, I had negative thoughts, despair, and low self-esteem, which prevented me from doing any job. For now, I am closer to others and my self-esteem has increased.

After I was welcome by a THARS psychologist, she helped me find solutions to my problems. The change happened first on the day someone told me that there were self-help groups in which savings and loans are dealt with which were put in place by the BBB Program. After I joined the SHG, I really met some real friends there. One day, a psychosocial assistant came to raise awareness about the trauma and its symptoms. I found that I had some of these symptoms. I confided in him, he listened to me and transferred me to a psychologist who helped me very much. Before I got there, I felt fear because I thought she (the psychologist) couldn't keep all my problems secret. As she came with me, my bad thoughts began to fade. She accompanied me to find psychological resilience to the difficult times I went through. The psychologist was able to stabilize my negative emotions. I also participated in a memory healing workshop where I met others who had problems more than me and there, I felt strengthened because I felt that I was not the only person to have this kind of problem.

Now, I feel good, I have inner peace (deep in my heart), and I sleep well. This sustainability allows me to carry out my daily activities without any problems and my relations with others have been restored. The most significant change is that now I can sleep well, hang out with friends, and do my daily activities well."

Rehabilitated

A man in Makamba narrated how healing past traumas freed him to have hope for a good future. "As far as my internal security is concerned, I feel comfortable here in Nyange. I try to use all my strength to face the difficulties because I have been accompanied on the psycho-social level. Thanks to the BBB program, I can associate with others without difficulties. As I am psychologically rehabilitated, I have peace in my heart, and I am doing as well as other members of my community. Being psychologically recovered comforted me. This change is very important because healing the trauma is the key to success for my life, being psychologically well opens the way to a good future."

These stories point to higher awareness among community members that untreated trauma of the past can become recurrent and hinder reconciliation processes.

■ Informal and transitional justice

According to the 2019 annual report, the BBB program has contributed to the reduction of conflicts, instability, and illegal migration by allowing communities to make use of informal and transitional justice mechanisms. As of 2019, there were 130 mediators and 130 paralegals to support communities' access to informal justice mechanisms for the prevention and resolution of conflicts. In 2019, the paralegals and mediators received 3,117 cases, of which 65% was marked

solved, 23% was referred to formal justice or transitional justice, while the rest of the cases remained under study. Unlike traditional informal justice structures (the Bashingantahe), mediators and paralegals offer services free of charge, without asking for any compensation or bribes. Of the stories collected in BBB-covered communities, 18% cited access to informal and transitional justice as the most significant change in their lives.

Confession and forgiveness

A man in Cibitoke explained how change happened for him. "After the drama (skit) held at the Buganda market in February 2019, which showed the realities of community conflict due to the crises in our country, I confessed the next day by confiding to one of the actors called Oda and told her: "When you played, you were talking about a certain Rupasu who stole the neighbor's cows; during this time I realized that I am among the people (the Rupasu) to whom you send your message." So, understand me, I'm the one who stole your goats, I ask for forgiveness first! Then I begged him not to say it out loud, fearing that all those who lost theirs would accuse me of stealing them. After, I gathered my family and Oda gathered hers, together we shared the joy when I handed over the goats.

It's been a long time since I've lived with this secret, I've revealed it to no one since. Today, I learned that to live better we should tell the truth and dare to ask forgiveness. I feel free after doing it. I handed over the goats; it's peace. I felt guilty for stealing my neighbor's goats and dared to ask for forgiveness while my friends prevented me from doing so, for fear of prompting research for other cases of theft that were made during times of crisis.

As you all know if there is one thing that is difficult to ask is forgiveness. To arrive at the stage of making me forgive it was a great struggle since I did not even see the importance with also the negative encouragement of the old companions in the rebellion. So, the most important change for me is to be able to approach this person whose goats I stole and ask for forgiveness. I understood that I could not continue to carry the load, that I might foster peace with my neighbors and to arrive at this stage I must acknowledge my errors."

Stories collected also mentioned the increased awareness of transitional justice and understanding the truth about what happened and forgiveness through skits and cinemas.

■ Preventing Gender-Based Violence

Participants that mentioned gender-based violence (GBV) cited it in terms of its reduction within households and the community in general. This perceived reduction in GBV may be based on personal experience or because of the work of the peace clubs and ABATANGAMUCO roles that have dealt with GBV cases.

The psychosocial assistants have contributed in domestic violence reduction in the community by awareness session organized.

Reduced problems

"With the arrival of the BBB program in our community, the problems started reducing, issues such as poverty, idleness of the youth, and domestic violence have really reduced", said participant from Kirundo province.

Less violence to women

A male participant from Musinga stated that "Men don't beat their wives anymore. They do not mistreat their wives in any way. They woke up, they are undertaking financial projects with their wives."

Justice

A peace club member also stated that: "In the past, if a man raped a girl, the man was forced to marry the girl instead of being punished by justice. Now that the peace clubs of which I am a member have been formed, we are assisting in the peaceful resolution of conflicts, and the offences are brought before the courts."

To this end the peace club members and Psychosocial assistants (APS) appear to be actively targeted and attempting to prevent GBV with some success as evidence in other quotes from community members. Participants perceptions as to how GBV decreasing pertain to a general reduction in fear, an acknowledgement of how trauma played out in personal relationships and an ability to refocus on livelihoods all contribution to this. It is more often the men within the narratives that acknowledge their negative behavior with their wives and freely admit to their wrongdoing.

A note on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

Although we do not yet have a full analysis of how the COVID-19 pandemic affected Burundi in all sectors of life, the GPI3 indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic will impact the global state of positive peace and that most countries will go into a recession. In Burundi, from the stories collected, we can already see how the pandemic has affected ongoing efforts by self-help groups and CLAs to build their small businesses.

In Cibitoke specifically, respondents shared their worries on how the pandemic will affect their business despite identifying some improvements in their communities' economic resiliency, positive engagements with each other, and hopes that "peace is achievable" (Cibitoke respondent). Sentiments from respondents include:

³ Institute for Economics & Peace. Global Peace Index 2020: Measuring Peace in a Complex World, Sydney, June 2020. Available from: <http://visionofhumanity.org/reports>

- As I mentioned earlier, I have experienced a loss in my watermelon business since during the pandemic, there is less movement of people, thus ending up with a loss.
- Personally, I can't say that I totally feel secure, given that we are in a perplexing time, getting closer to elections during a pandemic.
- Others invest in agro-pastoral, but the production is not so satisfactory due to the vagaries of the weather. Another concern without solution remains centered on the coronavirus pandemic. But sometimes the young members of the ruling party intimidate people of the other ethnic group (Tutsi) saying that they must vote for their ruling party.

A note on the fragile states index and global peace index

In 2020, Burundi scored 97.9 (out of maximum 120 points) in state fragility putting it 11th most fragile state out of 178 countries.¹ This is an improvement from 2016 when Burundi scored 100.7 points that brought it closer to collapse per the conflict assessment framework implemented by the FSI designed to measure state vulnerability in pre-conflict, active conflict, and post-conflict situations.

In 2020, Burundi ranked 132nd in the Global Peace Index¹ rising three places since the previous year with a score of 2.506, which means its state of peace is still very low compared to other countries in the world. In 2019, the country ranked 125 and 134 in 2018. This improvement is meaningful as in the 2017 GPI report, Burundi was the country with the most significant deterioration in the state of peace largely driven by the political crisis triggered by the re-election of Pierre Nkurunziza in July 2015 for the third consecutive five-year term in office.

Conclusion

For most of the program participants who shared their stories, they mentioned that they now have less inclination to participate in harmful activities (i.e., forced prostitution, illegal drug use, alcoholism, stealing) due to improved household economic conditions and access to income, savings, and loans. Participation in savings and loans programs have led to more meaningful employment and business ventures though the sustainability of such activities cannot be measured at this time.



In terms of community cohesion, even if there is lingering discomfort with people from different ethnic groups, community members see possible reconciliation through the work of mediators and through forgiveness in sessions organized by the programs.

The stories collected also demonstrated a shift in gender dynamics; the elevation of women taking a more active household and community leadership roles. It demonstrated that LCGG members facilitated the collaboration between citizens and local authorities. Among the responders, a sense of peace and safety have become more prevalent with an observation that there are less instances of economic migration to other countries like Tanzania (although harder data is needed to back this up). Stories gathered have also demonstrated that mental health in the communities are being valued more and restored with trauma healing being more available.

In terms of socio-political issues that have not improved, respondents mentioned that they still do not trust the formal justice system as access remains expensive and not seen as an effective way to resolve conflicts. Note that the BBB and Nyubahiriza do not work in the formal justice structures. In addition, despite improvement in job prospects and access to income, community members expressed that pervasive market instability across the country still means prices for food and other essentials remain too high. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on progress made on income-generating activities, small business, and security is worrisome and a fuller assessment of the impact on the programs overall need to be carried out when it is the right time to do so. It could also play a part in the end line evaluation for both programs. Some respondents also mentioned their worries about climate change and its impact on agriculture and crops, an issue that the programs do not directly address.

Signs of sustainability and resilience

Personal commitment from individuals to continue their role in peace clubs, VSLAs, CLAs, and LCGGs is strong. 99% (173/175) of peace club members interviewed in the quantitative survey said they will continue their role after the Nyubahiriza project is finished. The project has created champions who recognize the importance of self-reflection and knowledge. With this sense of duty

instilled in the community; participants in the qualitative interviews frequently cite passing on teachings to neighbors and others not directly involved in the project.

Stronger roles

Where local authorities were mentioned by respondents there was generally a sense of improvement in the relationship. Particularly where peace clubs and LCGGs have enabled stronger roles and links between communities and authorities. One respondent said that “drunkenness, fighting and cohabitation have diminished. These are settled first by the peace clubs. Only if one of the parties to the conflict is not satisfied with the verdict can he go to the local authorities.” This suggests peace clubs and LCGGs have adopted an informal first step in conflict mediation without the need to involve local authorities.

Authorities are no longer overburdened

Another participant stated that “local authorities are no longer overburdened by conflicts.” This is supported by the quantitative survey where 172/175 peace club members interviewed rated their collaboration with local authorities as positive. This is significant because local authorities may change during the election process and therefore operate in a key role for the sustainability of the project’s outcomes.

In anticipation of the change of local authorities during the elections, we asked current local authorities what they would recommend new local authorities continue forward as part of the project. A large majority (97%) said they should continue participating in training and awareness.

We might expect the development of peace and security plans to be a sign of sustainability; however, this was not mentioned at all by participants in the qualitative survey. This could mean that awareness of these plans is limited to peace club and LCGG members only, as in the quantitative survey 85% of peace club members interviewed said they had developed such a plan in their colline. 82% of local authorities interviewed also said they were involved in the development of these plans. Of those who have developed a peace and security plan, 125/142 (88%) said they felt it was successful.

Passing on teachings

Regarding livelihoods and our VSLA activities, 95% of VSLA and SHG members interviewed are now conducting income generating activities as part of the scheme, with 98% of these saying that their household finances, food security and income has changed in the past six months. Of those who said it had changed, 48% said it has increased a lot, and 50% said it has increased a little. This is supported by the qualitative survey where signs of sustainability are emerging in relation to how far respondents have purchased assets (e.g. goats). The motivation to create revenue generating

activities and to pass on teachings is strong. Many respondents refer to new learning on saving which could be a key sign to sustainability and managing money through socio-political shocks.

Entrepreneurship

More specifically, entrepreneurship is referenced by participants in the qualitative story and could be the most sustainable aspect of training if we are able to verify to what extent entrepreneurship training lead to activation of skills/established businesses.

Legitimizing money and business relationships

The project also enabled a new way of legitimizing relationships around money and business, “Before it was really hard to have someone who could lend you money. Even those who gave themselves money ended up creating conflicts because there was no witness or writing that proved that there was lending consent. So, it created a lack of confidence in money and it slowed our evolution in small business or other income-generating activity.” From this example we can infer that the VSLA/SHG association has enabled a space for constructive dialogue on money and targeted a root cause of conflict by providing alternative livelihood opportunities.

Microfinance and own investment

Almost all (99%) of VSLA members said they would continue their role after the project has finished and 100% of those carrying out income generating activities also said they would continue. There was no significant division between answers from men and women. This suggests the will and investment from project participants is strong. Beyond the income-generating activities itself, 78% (190 VSLA/SHG) members interviewed) received training in developing a business plan. However only 41% have received a loan from a microfinance institution. The opportunity from income generating activities to a business plan and loan from a microfinance institution does not appear to have reached all participants. Despite this, 63% (65 women, and 60 men) feel that they have enough skills to create their business.

Nyubahariza partners:



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In cooperation with Abatangamuco, ERB, La Benevolencija, MIPAREC, OAP, and THARS

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