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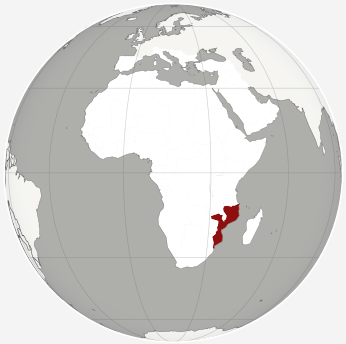
“To Respect a Woman as a Person”

Economic Empowerment of Women in Mozambique: Examples of an Inclusive Business Approach Combining Baobab Fruit Commercialisation, Life Skills and Nature Conservation

Project stats

Project name	Improving the framework conditions for the private and financial sector (ProEcon)
Commissioned by	Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung (BMZ)
Project region	Mozambique
Lead executing agency	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, GIZ
Duration	01.01.2017 – 30.06.2024



Unequal Equality: The Gender Situation in Mozambique

Workforce participation in Mozambique is high, both among women and men. However, vulnerable jobs are mostly held by women. Eighty per cent of the working women in Mozambique earn their living in the agricultural sector. As a rule, especially in rural and semi-urban areas, they look after the “Machambas”, small plots of land used for subsistence agriculture in rural areas.

Legislative rights ensure gender equality, taking into account the binary concept of male/female. However, **customs and traditions often contradict the law**, particularly in rural areas. In practice, women have a lower literacy rate compared to men, land is almost always owned by men, male relatives are privileged in matters of inheritance, hence most women do not actually own the resources they work with and, as such, are not granted freedom of choice.

Marriage under 18 and domestic violence are prohibited by law, including sexual harassment. Nevertheless, almost half of Mozambican women are mothers and/or live in “union” before reaching full age. The government has recently put a mechanism in place to support women who have experienced violence, yet it does not have the capacity to respond to the real need. The extreme gender inequality with regard to the roles played by women and men, is rarely perceived as such, but rather as “culture” or “tradition”. The different roles are taught at an early age by family members, for instance by aunts to girls and uncles to boys – and reinforced at community level by representatives of the major monotheistic religions
.
However, **a change is visible** among urban youth. Individuals and organisations are publicly raising the topic. Urban challenges and opportunities, such as shorter routes to schools, job opportunities, higher costs of living, all contribute to the change.

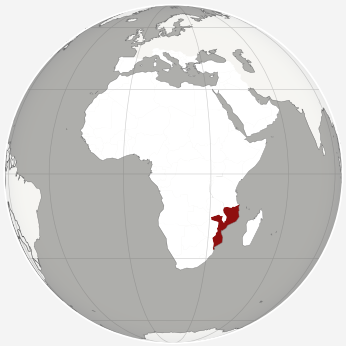
Integrated Partnership: GIZ ProEcon

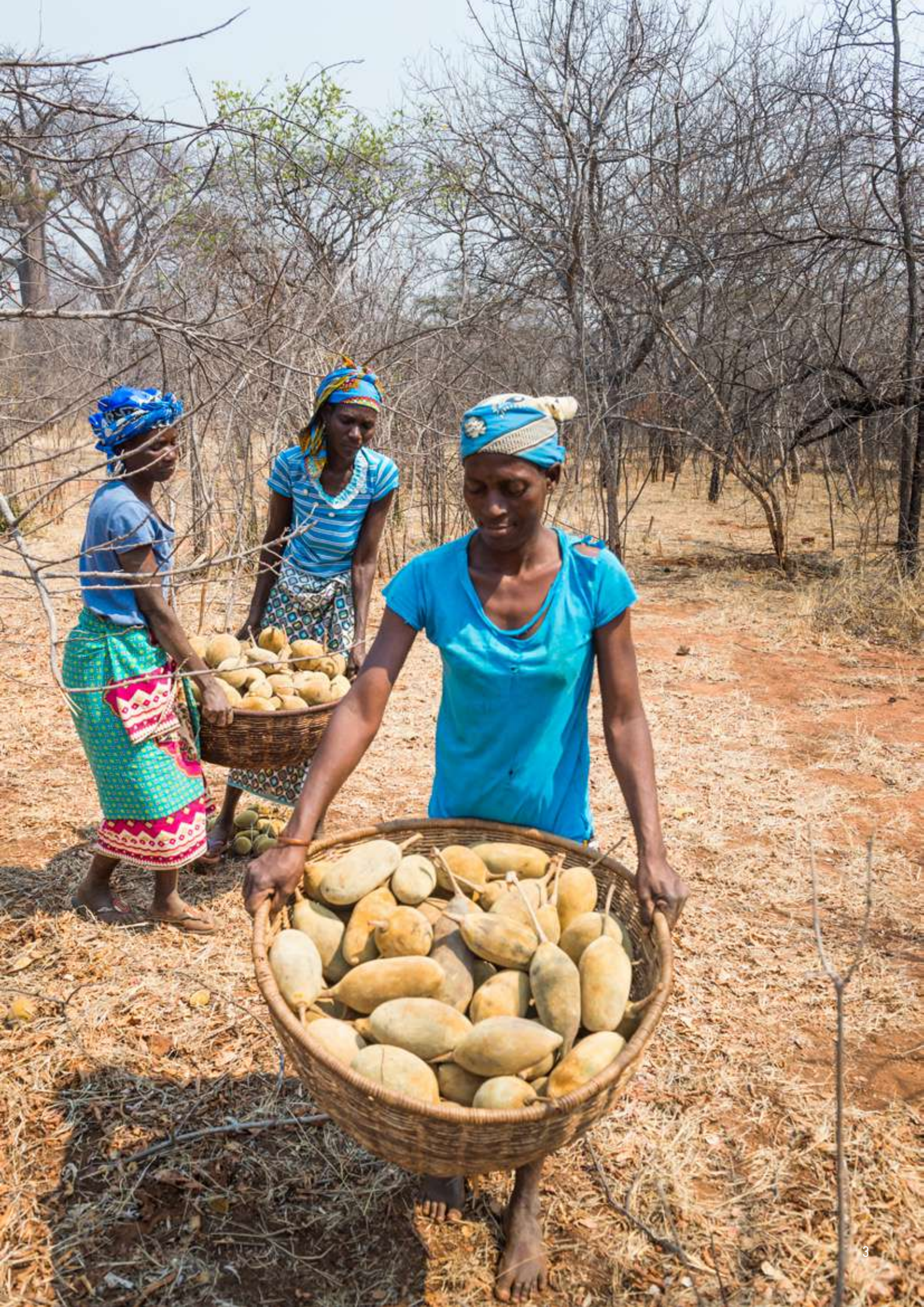
German Development Cooperation in Mozambique has been supporting Inclusive Business Models in the Sector of Sustainable Economic Development through the ProEcon project since 2017. These models are mainly implemented in the agricultural sector as part of an integrated development partnership with the private sector (iDPP), by way of a cost-sharing cooperation project with private companies. Demonstrating interest is a key criterion, as is the private company's potential to integrate smallholders, especially women, into their supply chains. The aim is to **increase and improve production** and processing, as well as the company's competitiveness to ensure sustainability.
One such win-win situation for women in particular, both in terms of development and business, has been achieved in the baobab value chain leading to better income and support for the empowerment of the micro-level collectors, all of whom are women.

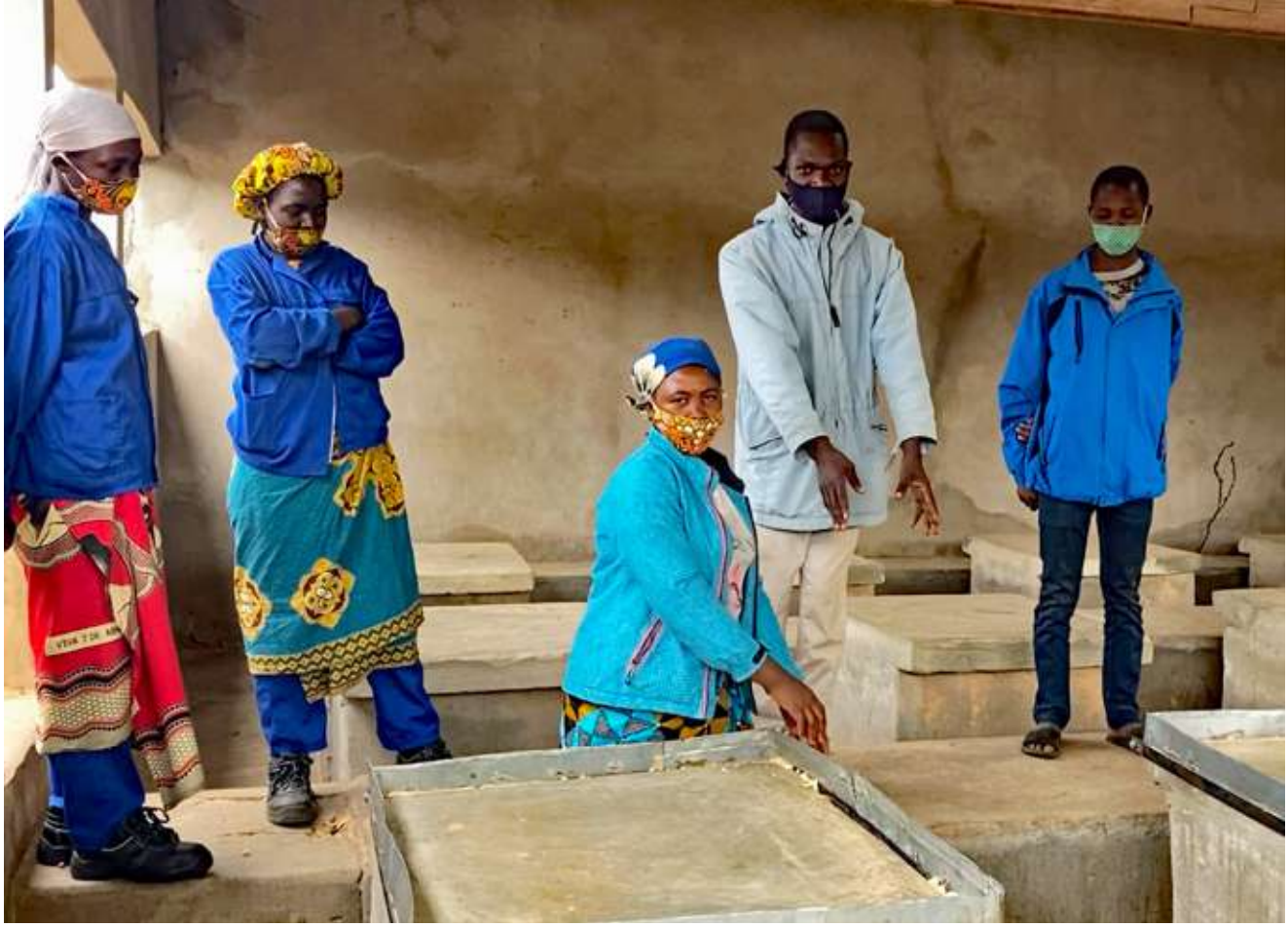
Considering the interest of the company **Baobab Products Mozambique** (BPM) to expand its supply chain, **BPM and the ProEcon project joined hands** in 2017 and signed an iDPP on a cost sharing basis with the objective of improving income and living conditions of 150 women baobab fruit collectors and their families. These women have gained new skills in baobab collection and pre-processing. In addition they accessed a secure market with better prices of around 10 Euro cents per kg (a 100% increase). BPM improved its supply of high quality certified organic baobab, thereby increasing the company's competitiveness in the international market.

Given the strong social impact of the BPM business model, together with the economic viability and potential for women's empowerment and for behavioral changes observed during the first year of partnership, the global project Green Innovation Centres for the Agriculture and Food Sector **(GIAE) in Mozambique** decided to scale up the initiative and signed an iDPP with BPM in 2018. The aim was to organise women collectors into an association, develop new markets and products and establish a pre-processing supply system at community level.

Project name	Green Innovation Centres for the Food and Agricultural Sector (GIAE)
Commissioned by	Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung (BMZ)
Project region	Mozambique
Lead executing agency	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, GIZ
Duration	01.03.2017 – 31.03.2024







Partner of ProEcon & GIAE in Mozambique:
The Micaia Foundation Provides Support to Baobab and Other Communities to Develop Sustainable Businesses in Manica Province

Inclusive Partnership: Micaia & BPM

"It was largely a matter of trial and error", says Andrew Kingman, as he sits in the small park at "Praça dos Heróis", a roundabout in Chimoio. The British social entrepreneur likes this small park in the centre of Manica's provincial capital. "We launched **BPM** in 2015, after three years of project work led by Micaia Foundation in the baobab-rich villages of northern Manica Province", he remembers.

The company is a subsidiary of Eco-Micaia Ltd, the social enterprise component of the Micaia 'family'. Andrew and his Mozambican partner, Milagre Nuvunga, established a social enterprise in 2008, alongside the non-profit Foundation, because they recognised the need to move from subsidy (project funding) to investment, in order to optimise the value chain. With the support from a UK-based donor, Micaia Foundation was able to help get BPM off the ground, funding training for women baobab fruit collectors.

"Activities of most local associations always depend on projects", Andrew says. He wanted communities to achieve self-sustaining development. Using grant funding, the foundation backed the launch phase, focusing on the women collectors, while the company used low-cost loans to expand its commercial operations. "Nobody gets rich from this, but the company has to make profit", he

says. Additionally, the Women Baobab Fruit Collectors Association will hold a 20 per cent share of BPM. “They have a voice now”, Andrew says.

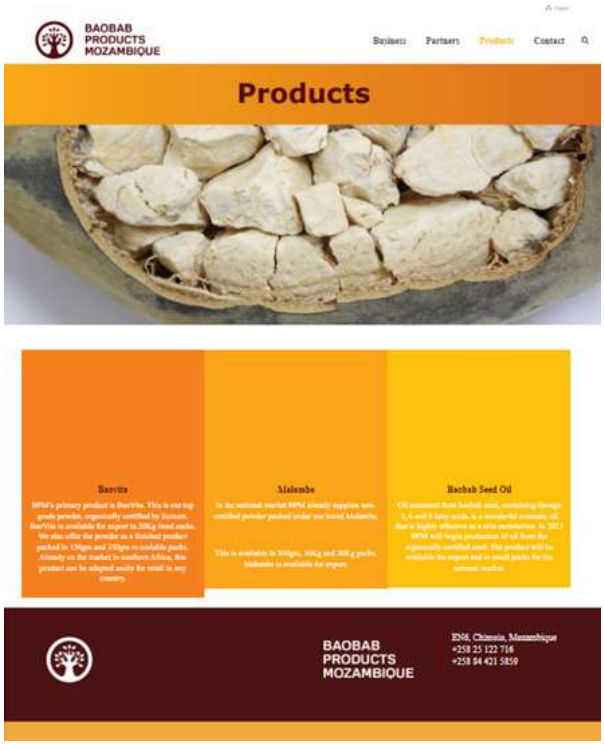
They collect the baobab fruit, known throughout Mozambique as “malambe”, and the BPM agents buy the malambe and organise the logistics. Some communities pre-process the baobab and BPM produces the powder, which is then sold to companies in Europe and North America and nationally. Baobab powder is rich in vitamins and micronutrients and therefore used as “superfood” and as an ingredient in many food products.

From subsidy to investment

While exporting baobab fruit powder, BPM is also developing new products for the local market such as baobab oil, and powders for flavoured drinks. “There are over 20 million potential clients in Mozambique. If we could sell all of the powder nationally, that would be preferable and more sustainable”, Andrew says.

Andrew had already worked with other associations in East and West Africa before he came to Mozambique in December 2007.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the transport of this export product was disrupted, leading to a delay in sales and hence a decrease in cash flow. Using additional Covid-19 relief funds from BMZ, GIAE established a revolving fund with Micaia Foundation, which was used to purchase the new baobab production from the women collectors. When the company finally sold its entire stock of organic Baobab fruit powder, the so-called “Resilience Fund” was reimbursed, and is now available for future crisis situations to meet BPM’s obligations to women.



Fire, Drought and Salty Water

The districts between Tete and Chimoio are extremely dry. A tarmac national road connects the two provincial capitals, crowded with dozens of old trucks, loaded with tons of logs. Sometimes, they have to wait for a few days at a cross road. This is where the old main road between the two towns begins, connecting numerous small villages, some of which are difficult to access. Along the sandy road, ruins of small colonial family farms sometimes pop up with their white walls covered in red dust. It is a rare scene to see a small tree struggling to survive amidst the bushes, let alone a tree with leaves. Water is scarce in this region and the water from boreholes below fifty meters in some of the communities is often salty. There are one or two minibuses a day that connect the villages to one of the towns for 140 MZN (1.85 Euro) – usually a pick-up truck called “My Love”, because people stand or sit so close together that it has sometimes sparked romance. There is no way to get to town and back in the same day with this kind of organised private public transport and most can’t even be back in two days.

“When I came here four years ago, everything was greener”, says Ana. The project manager of the Micaia Foundation regularly visits the communities, building networks, providing life skills training and advising the members of the Women Baobab Fruit Collectors Association.

Long distances, dry riverbeds and burned fields mark the northern interior of Manica province in Mozambique

Sections of the road run through a mountainous region, where they cross riverbeds, which are dry just like everything around, especially now in the dry season. It occasionally rains in the wet season, but when it does, it pours. “When it rains in the wet season, these rivers can only retain water for one or two days”, Ana says. The sandy soil has little ability to hold on to water.

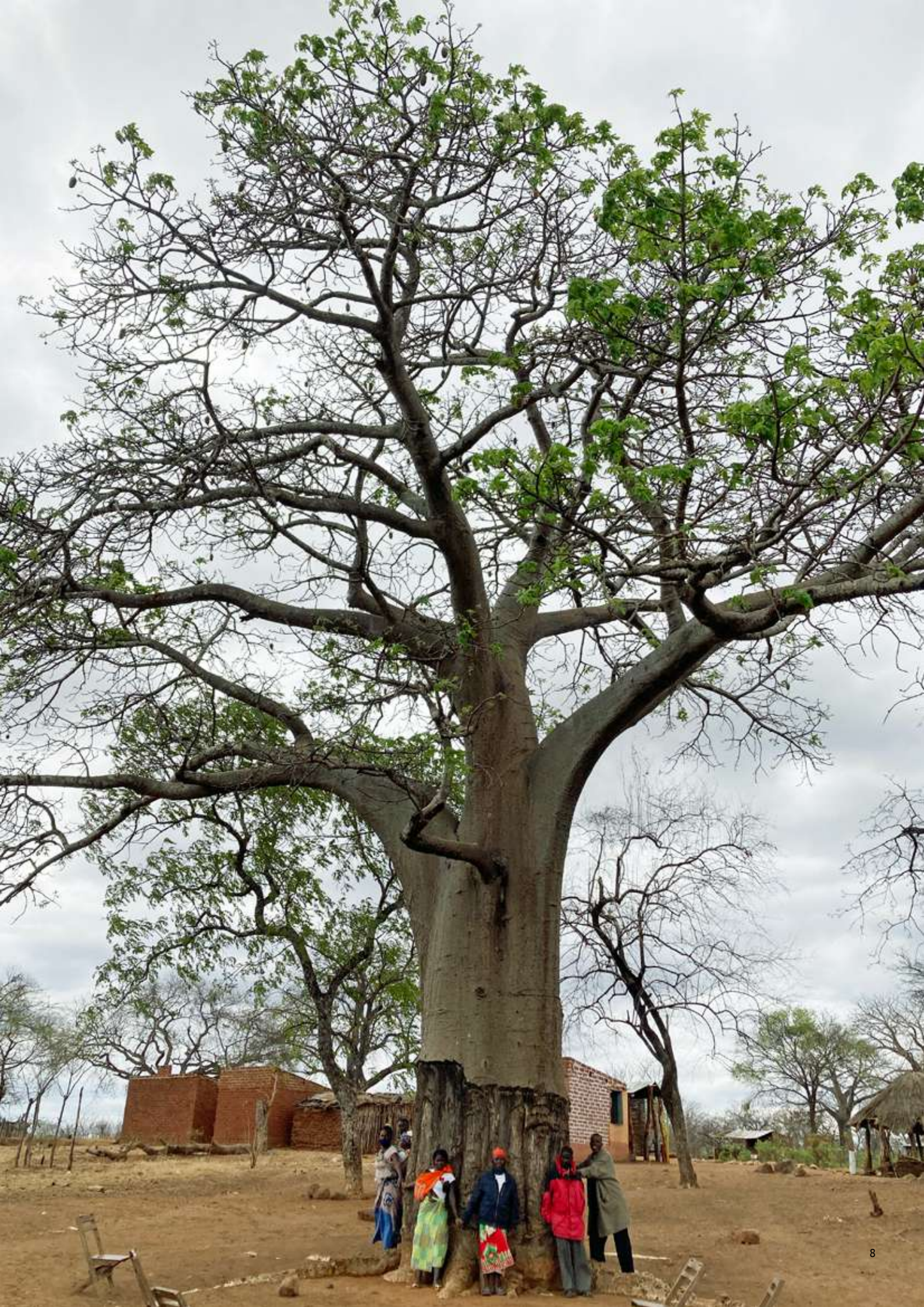
Mid October. The season for farming and collecting the baobab fruit has just come to an end – the rainy season lies ahead. Along the road, one can sometimes see people working in the fields, apparently in the middle of nowhere between two distant villages. Smoke rises here and there, bits of burnt wood, straw and bushes are scattered everywhere. The red of the sand gets mixed with black and grey. “People are cleaning the fields”, Ana explains. She has been stressing to communities for years that burning plant remains is dangerous and destroys the soil. Yet many still consider it more effective than clearing the soil with the old hoes.

Deforestation, often illicit, is the region’s nightmare. For many younger men, casual labour with logging companies is a quick and profitable source of income, especially in the agricultural off-season or whenever they fail to farm successfully. Bushes disappear when new fields are being prepared for farming. Every few years, men uproot and burn bushes and their wives clear the land for planting. Depending on a man’s age, most have two or more wives. While “Pai” (father) may have a field or part of a field for commercial use, each “Mãe” (mother) has her own field to feed her children and herself, which is shared with the family’s “father”.

Boys, aged eight to twelve years, herd the cattle. Goats are left to graze on their own. Income, especially from livestock, is managed by the men in the family, as is the case with most financial income. Women are expected to provide food and do most of the work.

Women rarely own their own livestock or benefit from its sale. This only happens if they are widowed and were not required to marry a relative of her late husband, often his brother – as is customary – or if they are able to get a divorce despite having very limited access to resources.

Whenever women get married, the groom pays a price for the bride. At the time of the “lobolo”, parents can negotiate certain conditions for their daughters, for example, their future husband's permission to finish their studies. Sometimes husbands have to pay a penalty to the girls’ parents or to the traditional leader if they treat their wives “so badly” as to cause unrest in the community.

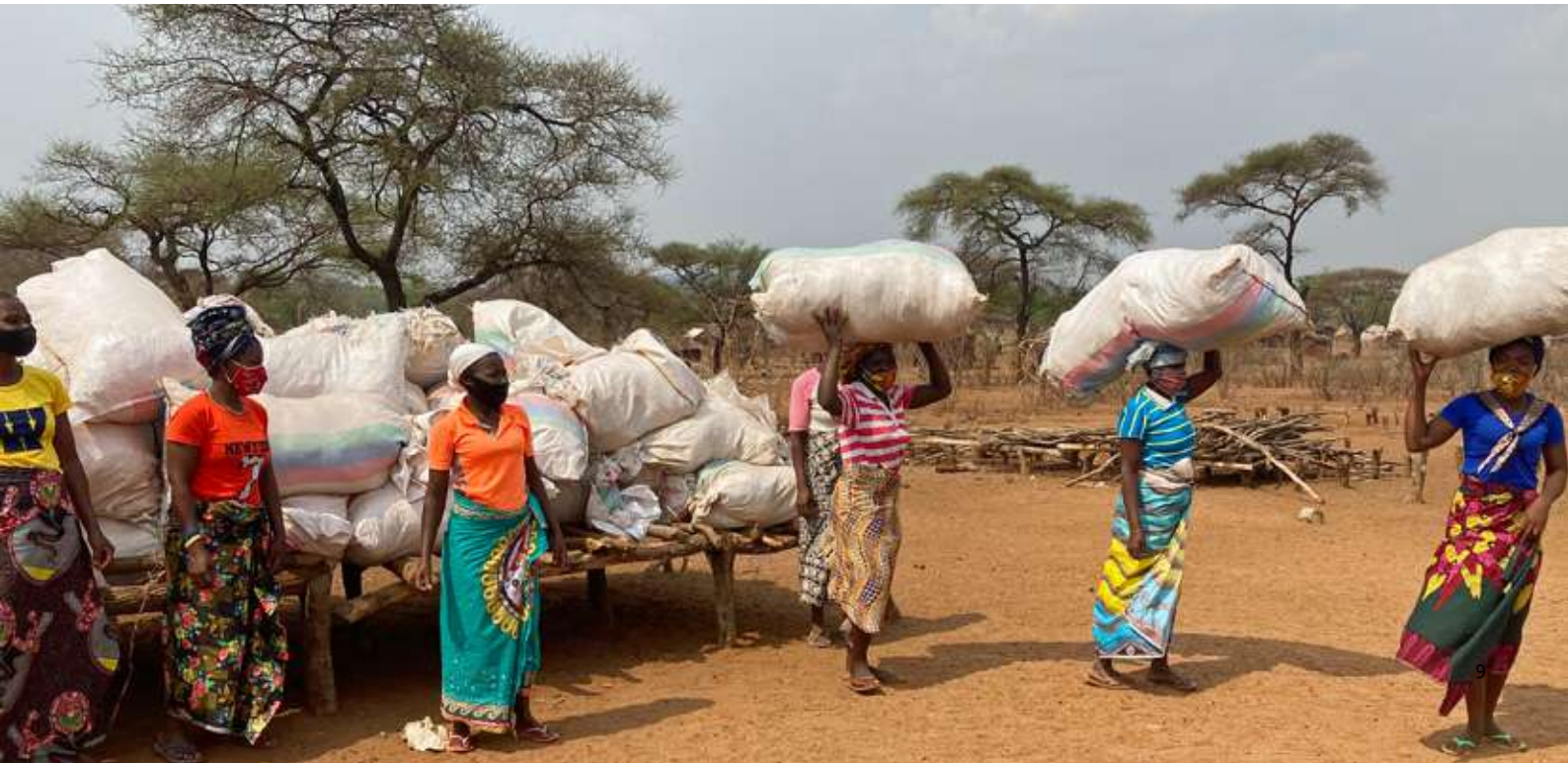


Baobab Trees – What Their Fruit Means to Women

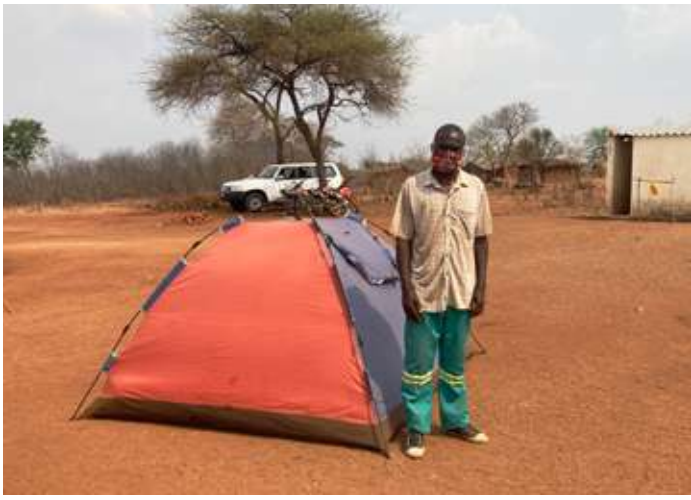
Baobab trees are strong giant trees and a distinctive feature of the landscape of the central and northern provinces of Mozambique. These mythical slow growing trees are easily over four metres in diameter with a lifespan of several hundred years. Their trunks are sometimes hollow, and their wood is too fibrous to be used for construction. Its fibrous inner bark can be used for making ropes. Each fruit contains lots of seeds, surrounded by a white brittle pulp. Due to its richness in vitamin C, iron and potassium it is very nutritious for humans.

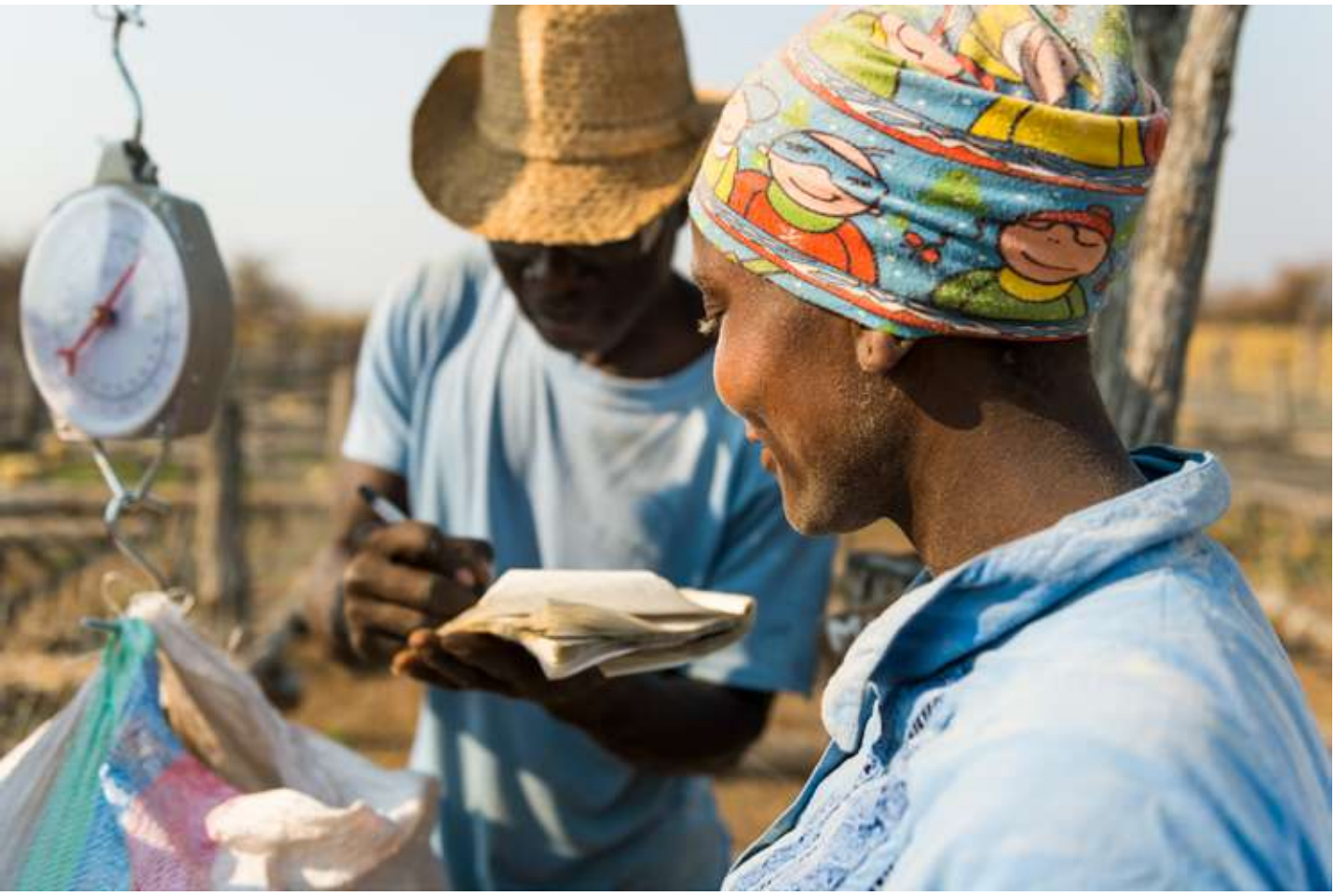
The baobab fruit wasn't widely used in the past. A few people, mostly women, collected them between April and August and sold them between 0,5 - 2,5 MZN (<1.7 Euro cents) per kilogram to informal itinerant traders, who in turn sold them to companies. Through professionalisation promoted by the Micaia Foundation and BPM, the price and quality of the baobab fruit have increased since then.

Women are trained on how and where to collect and pre-process the fruit following international standards and certification requirements. They are organised into an association that will soon be a shareholder in BPM. Henceforth, they will have a say and a right to a share in any future profits. Around 2,800 women participated in the BPM annual baobab harvest season and currently receive 7 MZN (±10 Euro cents) per kilo. Depending on time and effort spent, earnings may vary between a few hundred and up to 70,000 MZN per season (±100 Euro). The fruit bought by BPM have a fixed minimum size and have organic certification. Bags are provided by the company to avoid contamination with any other material.



Some members of the Association (lead collectors) are trained by BPM to organise fruit sales from their regions for a commission. This is then taken to the pre-processing centres. They issue vouchers to the collectors, stating the number of kilograms and the price. Once the agents have been to all 35 villages, they receive the cash from BPM and pay to the women collectors based on their vouchers. Usually this happens a few days after the purchase.





Maria

Maria has no husband and lives with her three children in a small hut. At night, she sits with her children or friends around a fire in the middle of her small yard. She has a few goats and a small maize field, sells peanuts and collects malambe. “Because I am the vice president of the Women Baobab Fruit Collectors Association, the community respects me”, Maria says. A few months ago, she participated in a GIZ meeting, as the representative of the Association, and received an award for her engagement.

Living without a husband in rural communities is rare, and not well accepted. People believe that women, especially young women, can be a potential “danger to husbands”, who can be bewitched or give them money or food in exchange for “sexual favours” instead of using the money or food in their own households. Nevertheless, Maria trains women on baobab fruit collection and sale via the Association, coordinates with the processing company, negotiates sales terms and conditions, as well as prices, and from time to time she is invited to training sessions. Thanks to Maria, the women of the village have a chance to earn money and they trust her for that. In addition, they realise that women can live on their own, are able to increase their income, make their own decisions and improve their living conditions.

Thanks to the income from the malambe and from a small remuneration she gets for her engagement in the Association, Maria was able to increase her goat herd. The tiny house built with real bricks, comprising a veranda and two rooms, is

almost ready. Sometimes she can even afford to pay someone to help her out. While she sits by the fire chatting, about ten children gather around her, curious about the visit.

Two of Maria's three youngest boys go to school. Not all children go to school, especially not after fifth grade, because schools for older children are in neighbouring villages, many kilometres away. A few minutes ago, she picked up her youngest son at the crowded water pump, where he had waited for his turn. He is only six years old. His slightly older brother holds a crinkled schoolbook in his hands and tries to read short stories out loud. He benefits from the presence of the translator, who focuses his attention on the little boy, helping and encouraging him to read.

When asked what changes she would like to see in the future for the sake of her children, Maria remarks: "I wish they would respect their spouses as persons, i.e. as separate human beings with their own capabilities".

A woman can live on her own and improve her life without a husband. This is the example that Maria sets for the other women in her village.

When Maria leaves her village to fulfil her duty to the Association, her children are left on their own to look after themselves. She makes food for a couple of days: "xima", a type of porridge made with water and corn flour, curry sauce and some vegetables.
Maria is proud of what she has achieved, and humble when she talks about it. She prefers to speak in the local language rather than Portuguese; she only does so when there is no interpreter around. "She is embarrassed because of her limited vocabulary and she's afraid of making grammar mistakes", says the interpreter, a woman who often works with Maria. The interpreter reveals Maria's future plans: She has learnt to ride a motorbike and now she wants to buy a small motorbike to help her transport the stones for the construction of her tiny little house and to carry the water from the pump back to the house and to carry other products to the markets.

Lídia

Lídia gets up at five o'clock in the morning, sometimes earlier. She sweeps the earth around the small clay hut, makes the food for her husband and children and prepares the water for her husband's bath. He gets up two hours later. On the way to the field, she makes short detours to pick malambe from the forest floor. "We only collect the ones that have already fallen from the trees and those which are not too small," she says. "We leave the small and broken fruits for the animals to eat and to allow new trees to grow." If the field needs to be cleared after the harvest or if a new field needs to be prepared, her husband comes later to help remove and burn the old plants. Sometimes he takes care of his own plot or helps his second wife on her field. In the afternoon, he goes to the village, either "to do business" with other men or to get something repaired. If there is a lot of work to do in the field, he may also help Lídia get the job done quickly before the heavy rains wash everything away. "Sometimes, men go to the village to buy and sell goods," Lídia adds.

According to Lídia, "The men's job is to keep track of everything". For example, he wants to know whether there's anything in the hut that needs repairing or if she needs him to buy something in the village market, or when it's the right time to prepare the field or if the crop needs to be harvested. "Men build the structure of the house", says a male villager. "Women cover the walls with clay", explains Lídia.

While Lídia is away working in the field, her older children take care of the younger ones, they also bring water from the village pump or are at school.

On the way back home, she brings the malambe she collected in the fields. “If our women have gathered a lot of fruit, we help them bring it home”, says another man.

Most women give a share of their earnings to their husbands, who “allowed them to collect the malambe”. If the amount is around or below six Euros, husbands usually let them keep the full amount.

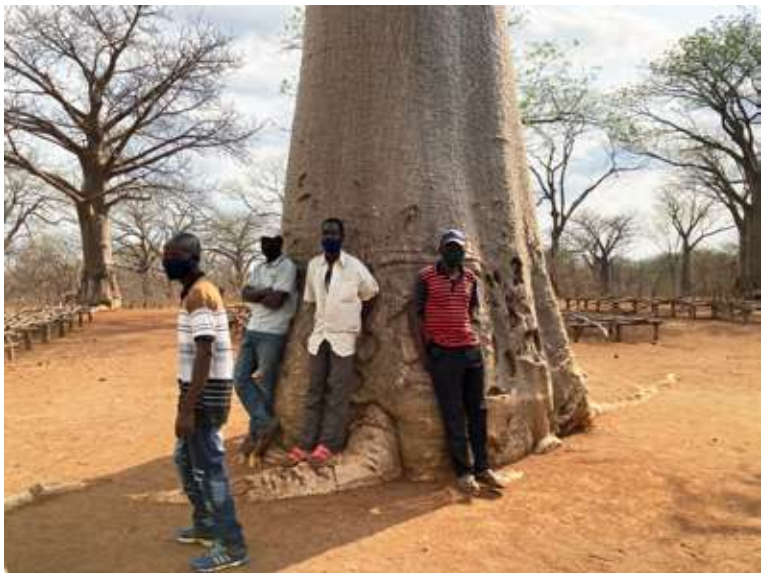
Lídia’s husband built a wooden framework, about one metre off the ground, where she puts the malambe to keep it dry and safe from animals.
Lídia is happy that her husband has allowed her to collect malambe. “Now I have some money to spend on my family”, she says. She can buy soap, food, schoolbooks, clothes for her children and herself – and a bed. When she receives the money from collecting the malambe, her husband expects her to show him how much she has earned. She tells him what she will buy with the money and often gives him a share of her earnings so that he will let her continue collecting malambe.

“It is good that our women earn some money”, says another husband from the village. “This way our wives can buy things for themselves and we do not have to give them money,” he adds.
If women earn more than MZN 500 to 700 (7-10 Euro), some husbands expect their wives to give them a share of the money. If they earn less than that, they prefer not to ask for a contribution. “If our husbands don’t ask for our contribution to the family, then others might think something is wrong”, Lídia explains. “Men have to pay a price for the bride”, another man explains, “so women have to contribute to the family’s wealth,” he adds. It all depends on the family and how the husband wants to spend the money. He can use it for the well-being of the family, e.g. repairing the house, or he may use it to support other wives, or as he pleases. Others believe that the husband should save all the money to invest it later on a goat, for example. “Women would most probably spend the money on the basic necessities of life, like food and soap, instead of investing it”, they argue.

Some men support their children’s school education. In some villages, children can only go as far as grade five. To continue their education, they have to move to another village, as it is too far to walk there every day. In these circumstances, the local leader rents or buys a small house in a nearby village where the children can live while they continue their studies. Other members of the community may also rent space in these houses.

Lídia is glad that she earns her own money: “I feel like a person”

Parents usually invest in their male children. “Later, a man can support his family”, one man says. “When a girl gets married, she never visits her parents again.” Another man makes a careful observation, “Educated young women can make a living in town and eventually they can come back home and support their family”, he says. Another man says

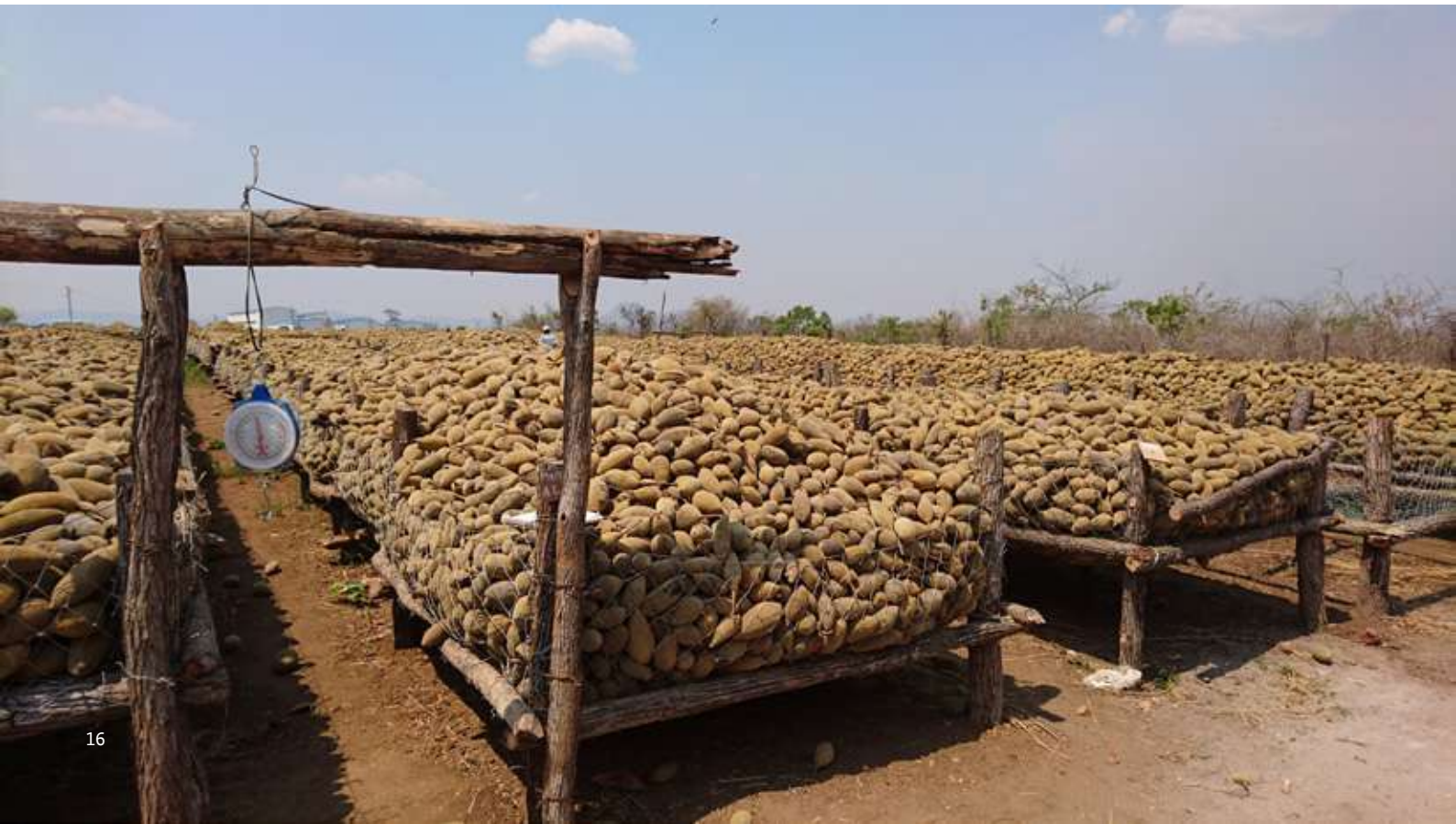


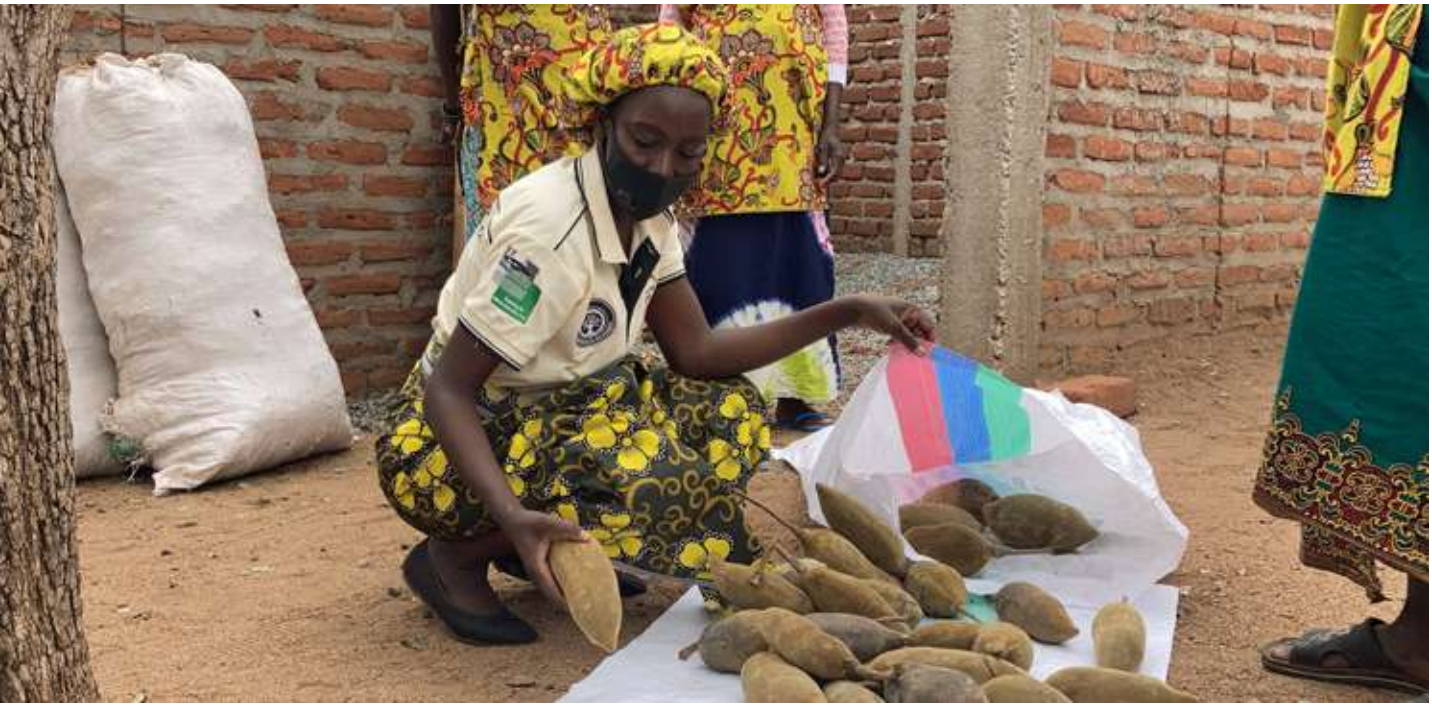
that studying and living in town can be dangerous for young women – they can become “prostitutes”, which means they can no longer get married or alternatively they choose a man with whom their fathers do not agree. “Becoming a woman does not depend so much on the age of the girl. You can tell when a girl is ready, when she knows how to fulfil her duties. This is the time when she can get married.”

Dinner is prepared at around seven o’clock. In most families, the husband eats first. Lídia attended the training session on life skills and literacy at the Micaia Foundation and explains why her children get the most nutritious parts of the food. “We have learnt that eating well is important for our children, so that they can grow up healthy and be able to learn at school.”

Lídia's day only ends late, after dark. Her husband sits around chatting with some male villagers and goes to bed in his own hut about two hours later.

Although she has to share her small income with her husband, Lídia is happy to earn her own money: “I feel like a human being”, she says. This money allows her to decide, at least to some extent, what to buy and how to spend part of the little money she has. This makes her feel good when she is with other women collecting or pre-processing the fruit.





Cacilda

As the first elected president of the Women Baobab Fruit Collectors Association, Cacilda had to make a presentation to the authorities during an official meeting. “I was initially a bit nervous during my first meeting with the district authorities”, she recalls. “But then I told them all about our activities”, she adds attempting to hide her pride. Cacilda struggled against the authorities' attempts to extort the business from these women. Through her work in the Association, she gained self-confidence and recognition. As a representative of the Association, she negotiates prices with BPM, the Baobab Fruit Processing company. For example, up until 2019, women collectors received 6 MZNs per kilogram, now they receive 7 MZN. Last year they were trying to negotiate the price up to 8 MZN per kilo, but because of the Covid-19 pandemic, sales were at risk and price increase was postponed. As the Association will own twenty percent of BPM in the future, she also advises the company, for example, on which additional villages should be included. “Initially, the women in the neighbouring village were not interested in collecting malambe”, Cacilda recalls, but now they have changed their minds and BPM is going to start working with this community.

She also recommended another village, which BPM trucks struggled to access. Two years ago, the women in this village had picked a lot of malambe and it was agreed that the company would send a truck to collect it. The women waited for a long time, but the truck never arrived, because access was too difficult. Cacilda and the other members of the Associa-

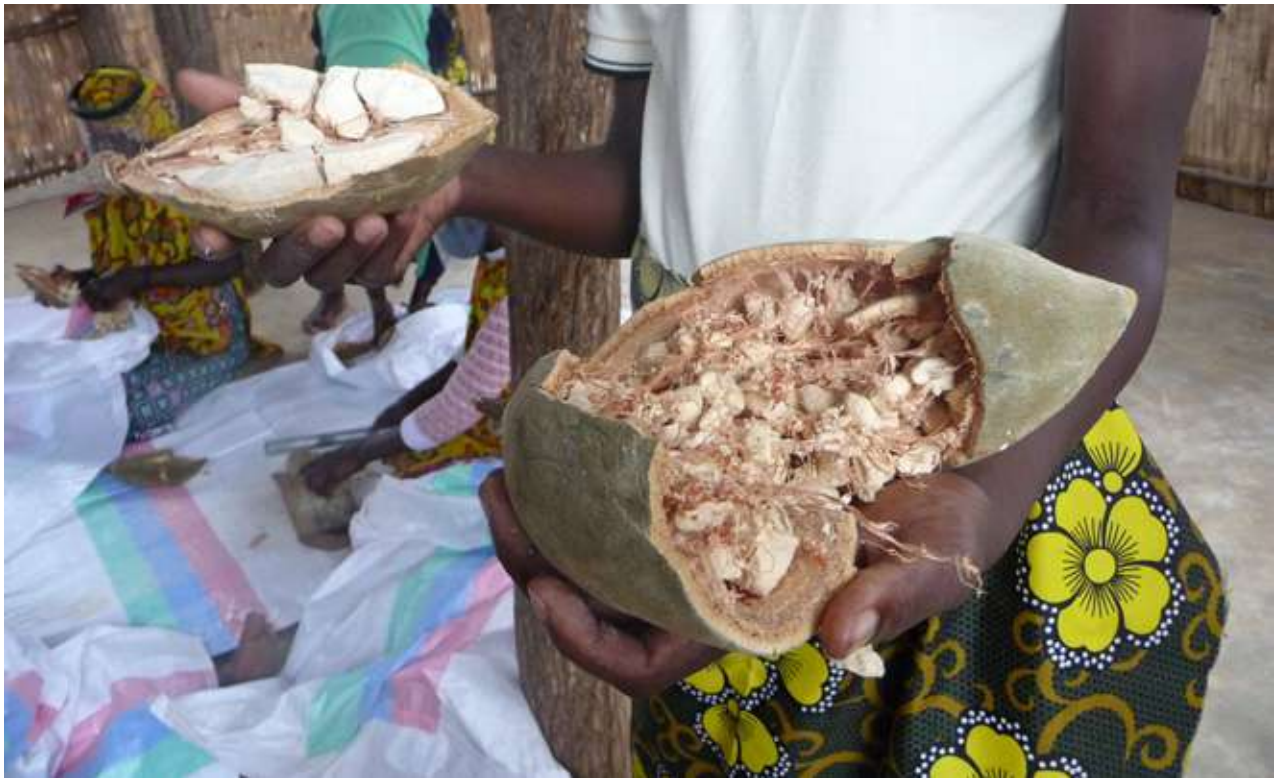
tion have now sorted out this issue with BPM, which now has a person responsible for logistics. This remote village is the first on the truck's itinerary.

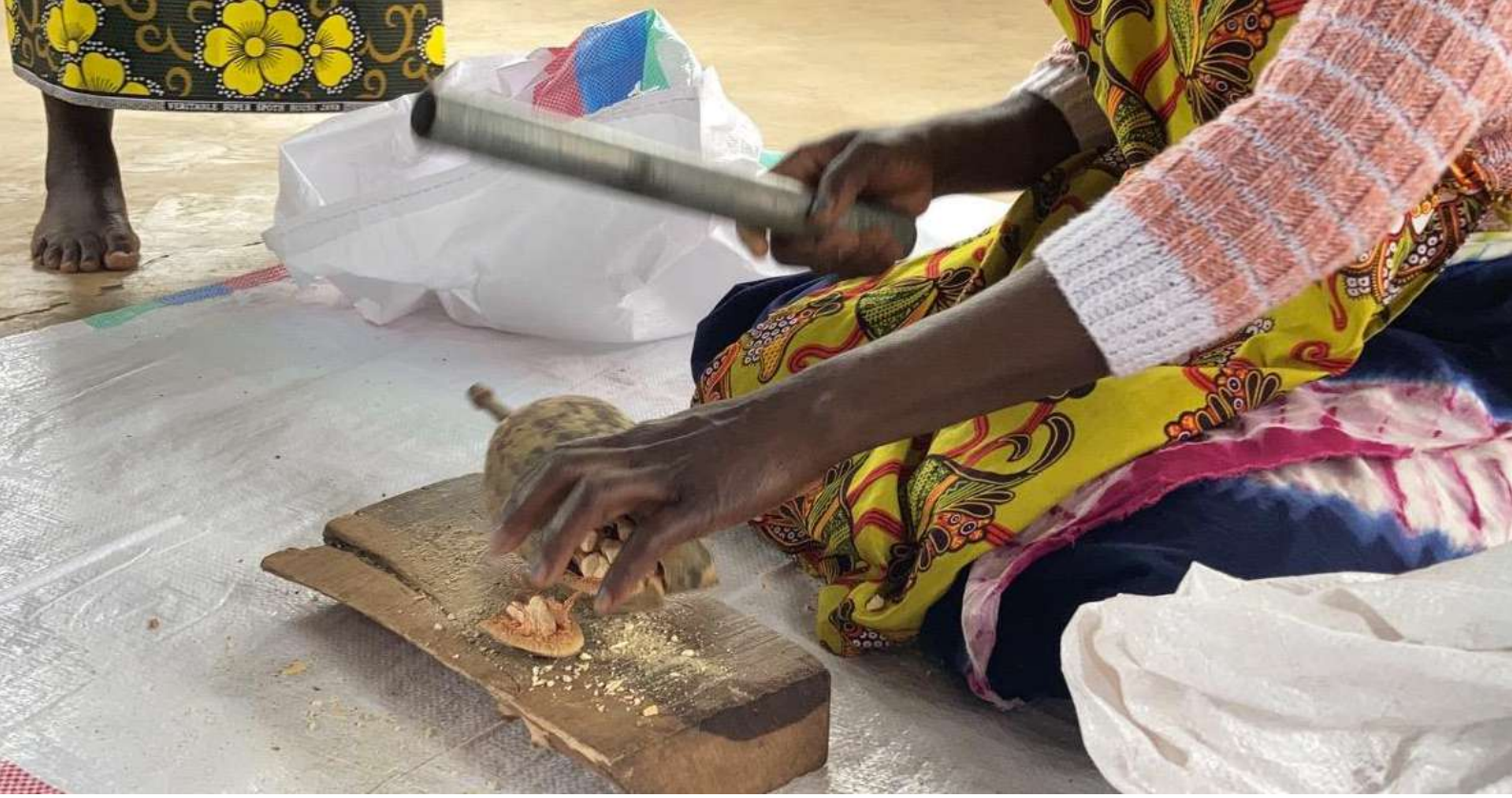
On another occasion, Cacilda and the other Association representatives advocated for the working conditions of BPM agents. During the harvest season, they monitor the collection process in the villages, support logistics and are responsible for the final payment. Some of them live in tents during the three harvest months, others rent a small house in one of the villages.

"I enjoy living on my own," says Cacilda.

BPM has built a small centre in Cacilda's village, where several hundred kilograms of baobab fruits are pre-processed and stocked. Together with other women members of the Association, lead collectors, Cacilda provides training to local women, who receive new special bags to ensure they do not transport the certified fruit in bags that could be contaminated. By the end of the season, they all meet at the pre-processing hall. Every woman brings one or several bags full of malambe. The bags are emptied, one after the other. The small and broken fruits are set aside and the good ones are weighed. Cacilda and other members of the Association write down the name, weight and value, and the BPM agent signs and hands a small voucher to the women who brought the bags. They explain what is written on it, as many women can barely read or do the math. The fruits are placed on a wooden structure to dry until all the women empty their bags and receive their vouchers.

"Sometimes the women in the village protest against receiving less than another woman with the same number of bags", Cacilda says. This is because most of them count the number of bags, but





not the kilograms. The weight varies depending on the quality and humidity of the fruits and how the bag is packed. Cacilda and her colleagues try to explain these differences to them and are usually able to settle the conflict.

From inside the pre-processing hall a pounding noise echoes through the village. The baobab club members hit each fruit with a metal rod to open it. If the pulp is thick and consistent, they stock it carefully, if it is crumbled or has maggots, they put it aside as it may still be used to feed animals. Lead collectors such as Cacilda are paid 300 MZN (±4 Euros) for each day's work at the sales booth.

At each stage, the lead collector women and the agent sign a form stating the volume, time of arrival and time of departure. Once the agents have the data from all the villages, they return to the company and organise transport and payment for all women collectors. "With this money we can buy shoes, notebooks and schoolbooks for our children", Cacilda's colleagues add.

Cacilda is a widow. According to tradition, Cacilda and her three sons would have become part of her husband's brother family, most likely as an additional wife. However, she decided to involve the local traditional leader, the "régulo", in the negotiations and was allowed to live on her own, providing for her children. Her position in the Association and her work for the community earned her respect in the village. "I enjoy living on my own", Cacilda says. This means that she can make her own decisions. Cacilda's mother helps her look after her children, while she works for the Association. Just like the last General Meeting of the Association, which was organised by Cacilda and other board members, she assembled more than 45 lead collectors from various villages to enable them to share their experience in collecting, processing and selling baobab fruit.

"When my daughter is my age, I hope her children take care of her," Cacilda's mother says.

I would like the children to acknowledge what their parents have done for them, but now things have changed. In her opinion, it is more important nowadays for girls to also finish school before they get married, her mother explains.

In February 2022 Cacilda (l.) passed away. We hope that her example continues to be an inspiration for women and men within the communities

Orlanda & Anifa

A few kilometres north of the Guro district capital, a new building has been erected about a hundred metres away from the paved national road. On its left side, there is a large structure made of small tree branches to store the baobab fruits collected by the women from the surrounding villages that don't have a pre-processing centre. The first room looks brand new. It is clean, like a traditional fish market that has never been used, with tables, benches and cubby-holes as if made from a single cement mould. In this room, women sort the fruit by size and quality and open them up. Two men coordinate the work.

Two steps lead to the processing room where Orlanda works on one of the two stainless steel racks. They are filled with baobab pulp powder. There's a hole at each end of the rack where a large bag is attached. The last stones, fibres and chunks are removed by eight female hands that push the fine powder through these holes into the bag.

"Micaia Foundation has changed our lives", says Orlanda. She works in a processing site, close to the capital of Guro district. "It feels good to have a job", she declares. She earns her own money, which she partly shares with her husband. "We decide together what we need to buy", she adds. They have jobs depending on seasonal vacancies. For four months a year, she refines the baobab fruit powder and has a regular salary and working hours.

"We decide together what we need to buy," she says, "but according to our culture, the final decision is made by the man."

"The man makes the final decision, that's our culture", she adds. However, if she didn't really agree with his decision, she would raise the issue again.

The same baobab processing occurs at the BPM site in Chimoio, where women and men work together on the metal racks. The powder is checked again for quality and is refined by newly purchased machines. Nine people work here permanently, five of whom are women. The remaining 16 are seasonal workers. At present, approximately 100 tonnes of powder are produced each year from the malambe collected by around 2,800 women from around 35 villages in Guro and Tambara districts. Eighty per cent of the production is exported to Europe, mostly to Germany, where it is mainly used as food additive. "We are also trying to extract the oil from the baobab seed", explains Anifa. She is the supply chain manager of BPM.

"The Women Baobab Fruit Collectors Association will hold a 20 per cent share in BPM, in order to help ensure sustainability of the Association", Anifa explains. This new approach, backed by the work undertaken by the Micaia Foundation and the support of GIZ, enables the engagement of communities as active partners. This provides the opportunity to conduct life skill training sessions, thereby creating a venue for women and men to reflect on gender relations in the villages, improve their diets and develop their farming skills. "We talk about their hopes and aspirations for the future and how to achieve them. We also discuss alternatives to burning the bushes when preparing or cleaning a field", says Ana, Micaia project manager. "And we also provide literacy training." They strive to associate a more sustainable use of the region's natural resources with gender equality and income generation. By achieving financial resilience and by implementing the new methods, the social and economic situation in these districts will improve with a lasting effect. "And it may contribute to reverse deforestation", Ana concludes, while remembering how much greener the region used to be a couple of years ago.

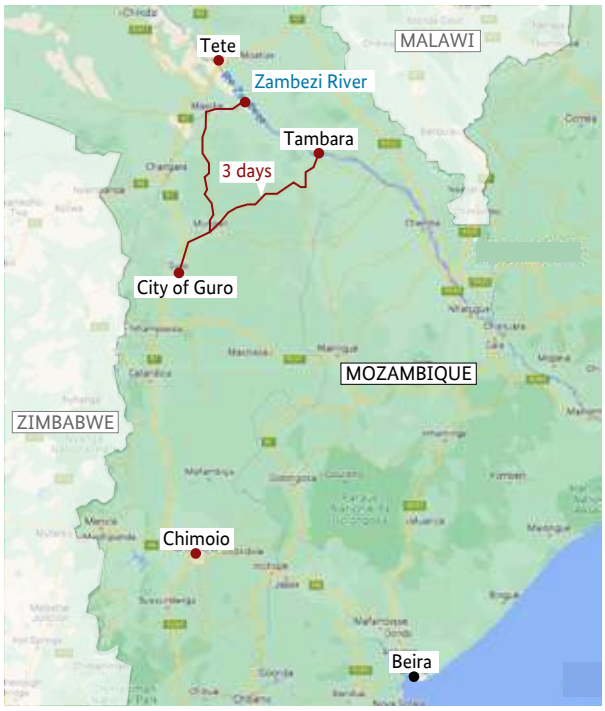
The Covid-19 Pandemic

The president of the Association recalls there was less contact between people during the pandemic, inevitably leading to the loss of income from the baobab fruit. “Many things changed during these difficult times”, says Cacilda's mother. For example, women used to do high five when they laughed at something, or they would hand their babies to each other whenever necessary. “That doesn't happen anymore”, even though no case of Covid-19 has been recorded in their village.

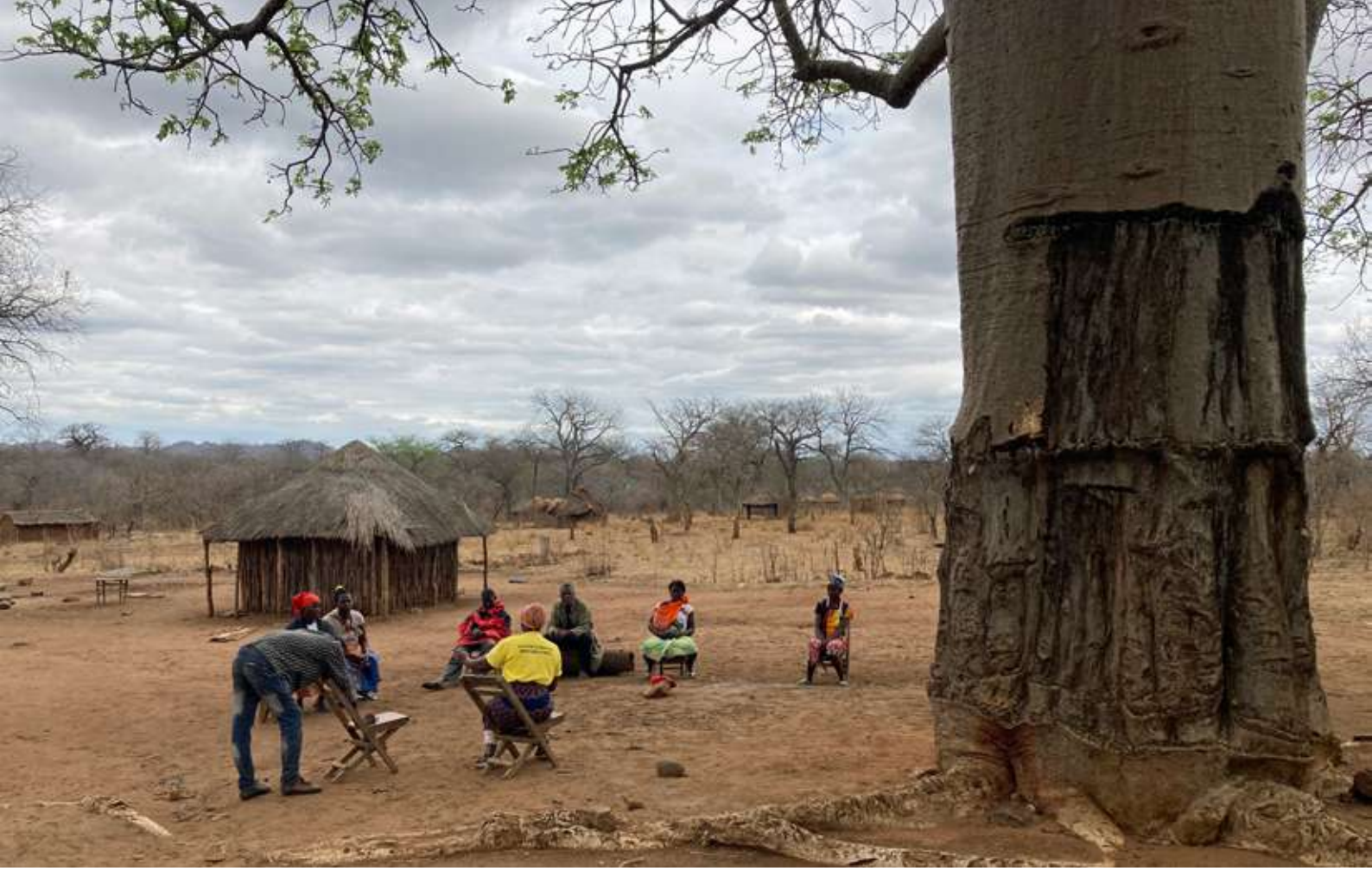
BPM faced a few challenges to sell its products for a while. Export routes were disrupted, and European customers did not order the baobab powder as expected. As a result, BPM was unable to purchase baobab fruit. The company received an advance payment from BMZ Covid-19 funds via the GIAE project, thus protecting the annual income of 2,800 women collectors. At the same time, the company entered a new market and sold most of its stock to South Africa. In the meantime, community visits have almost returned to normal and the 2021 season was pretty much back to the way it was. The Association members now have a sense of relief. However, certain measures are still in place: people have less physical contact with each other, they no longer exchange high fives. Women do not meet as often and therefore discuss private matters less frequently. In the past, the Micaia Foundation training on life skills aimed at supporting the malambe association both through training and technical expertise and provided safe spaces where women could meet and exchange their ideas. Unfortunately, these episodes were lost during the Covid-19 pandemic. New opportunities for networking among women slowly emerged during the 2021 baobab season.

Methodology

The author visited five communities (Nhamassanga, Nhalua, Demaufe, Lampa, Tsandzabue) from 18 to 23 October 2021, along the old national road from Chimoio to Tete, in Guro and Tambara districts, in Manica province. Group and individual interviews were conducted in these villages, each attended by approximately eight to ten women and six to ten men in separate sessions, including interviews with traditional leaders and local politicians ("régulos" and "chefes do bairro"). Most people in this region, especially women, speak the local language, partly mixed with Portuguese and English words. Ana Mlambo, project manager at the Micaia Foundation, who is widely known in the villages, earned the trust of the villagers and conducted the interviews based on her in-depth knowledge of the region and local language skills.



The author also visited a pre-processing centre in one of these communities and in the town of Guro, as well as the processing factory of BPM in Chimoio. The trip was organized and guided by Ana Mlambo, with the support of the ProEcon and GIAE projects. Interviews in Maputo were held with Andrew Kingman, founder and director of the Micaia Foundation, and with Doris Becker, GIZ project director.



Learnings

Women who live on their own are often discriminated against by their communities. When they take on roles that are relevant to other women, such as being the head of an organisation, they gain importance and therefore respect. In such leading positions, they can influence the perception of family structure. Others see them as role models, challenging mindsets.

In remote rural areas, women often have no or almost no income. Companies that promote gender equality and create socially accepted “women's jobs” can provide them with income. However, their husbands expect them to disclose and share their income with them, even though they do not do so themselves. If income is not in cash or if it is below a certain amount, husbands usually do not demand a share of the women’s income. Thus, if the payment coincides with savings group sessions or is processed via mobile money, women have a better chance to decide what to do with their money.

Women tend to have less access to school education than men. From grade 5 upwards, many schools are far away, so if students want to continue their studies they have to live in larger villages or the nearest town. Some villages provide small houses for young people to live in while furthering their studies. Yet, parents would rather send their sons to these houses, as they believe that young

women (or girls) living alone in town could become sex workers or get pregnant, thereupon committing themselves to their husbands alone and not the family. Hence, investing in girls is considered "less profitable" than in boys. Yet, these privately organised "boarding schools" could be a gateway to improve girls' access to education and provide them with additional information on their rights and opportunities.

The women baobab fruit collectors are represented via the Association and have a voice in BPM. This gives them access to information and training, as well as better market prices, to improve the quality of their product (including organic certification). The fact that all these women work towards a common goal provides an opportunity not only for an exchange of views on private topics, but also on their work experience. It is a chance for networking among women, which can also be used as a lever for other subjects, such as gender roles and rights, including defence mechanisms against (gender based) violence and notions of child education.

Similar approaches with other products can be used to bring men together. Although they have their moments of networking and "doing business", getting them together for learning purposes can provide an instance where masculinity roles, advantages of gender equity/equality, GBV prevention, fair and discrimination-free interaction can be discussed.

Role models are perceived as "culture" or "tradition" and as such very often not changeable. Men "invest" in women when paying the bride token (known as "lobolo") and therefore women "have to serve". A woman is respected if married. If the man has several wives, the first wife often has a greater say; ultimately, decisions are made by the "father" (husband) in the home. If a man dies, she and her goods "belong" to the brother or nearest male relative of the husband. Women definitely have fewer choices, as they don't have resources to build their own lives. If under such circumstances a woman has a basic income that does not depend on a piece of land (which would be transferred to the husband's family), such as collecting wild fruits or processing of goods, she could in some cases negotiate – with the help of the elders – to continue to live on her own. Later, that could provide her with more choices on how to shape and organise her life.

The author expresses profound gratitude to the participants of the interviews, especially the women, for their openness and confidence during the visits. He also wishes to thank Ana Mlambo (Micaia Foundation) very much for the excellent team work and organisation, as well as for her patience and professional linguistic and – more importantly: cultural – translation from Portuguese to local language and vice-versa.

Imprint

Published by the
Deutsche Gesellschaft für
Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

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As at
November 2021 / September 2022

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On behalf of the
German Federal Ministry for Economic
Cooperation and Development (BMZ)