

We Grow Together







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This Flipbook is dedicated to the communities of Awach, Gulu, who opened their homes and hearts to the research team. This book is designed for and by them. Apwoyo matek."

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Orach stumbled to his stool, spilling liquid from the bottle he was holding.

“Do we have any food in this home?” He belched.

Dinah, his wife, had just come from the garden. She shot him a tired look.

“No,” she replied weakly.

“This is why I hate living here!” Orach complained.

His youngest child ran over to him.

“Baba, the teacher asked us to wear our school uniform tomorrow,” she said, smiling. Orach shook his head and mumbled to himself before staggering away.



At the bar, Orach found his friend Ouma already drinking.

“Lend me some money,” Orach demanded.

Ouma shook his head.

“You owe me a lot of money and you refuse to work. Where will you get the money to pay me back?” Ouma replied bitterly.

“Don’t you know that I have a lot of problems?” Orach shouted back. Ouma only stared at him and continued sipping on his drink.

The owner of the bar looked at Orach and smiled.

“I will give you a drink on credit,” she offered.

Orach grinned at Ouma. Soon, Orach’s other friends began to arrive and buy him lots of alcohol.



Orach woke up the next day on the street outside the bar. Everyone was gone. He had gotten so drunk the night before that he had not been able to walk back home. Orach tottered home, muttering to himself.

On the way, Orach saw a group of women sitting under a big tree. They were preparing soil for nursery beds to grow trees.

Orach staggered towards the women. “Useless women! Why do you waste your time with this kind of work?” Orach sneered.

Some of the women shot him pitiful looks and started whispering. Others shouted at him to go away.



A few days later, Dinah asked Orach to help her plant cassava. As Orach approached the farm, he saw another farm of trees surrounding a big beautiful house.

“Whose farm is that?” Orach asked Dinah.

“That is Ayot’s farm,” she responded.

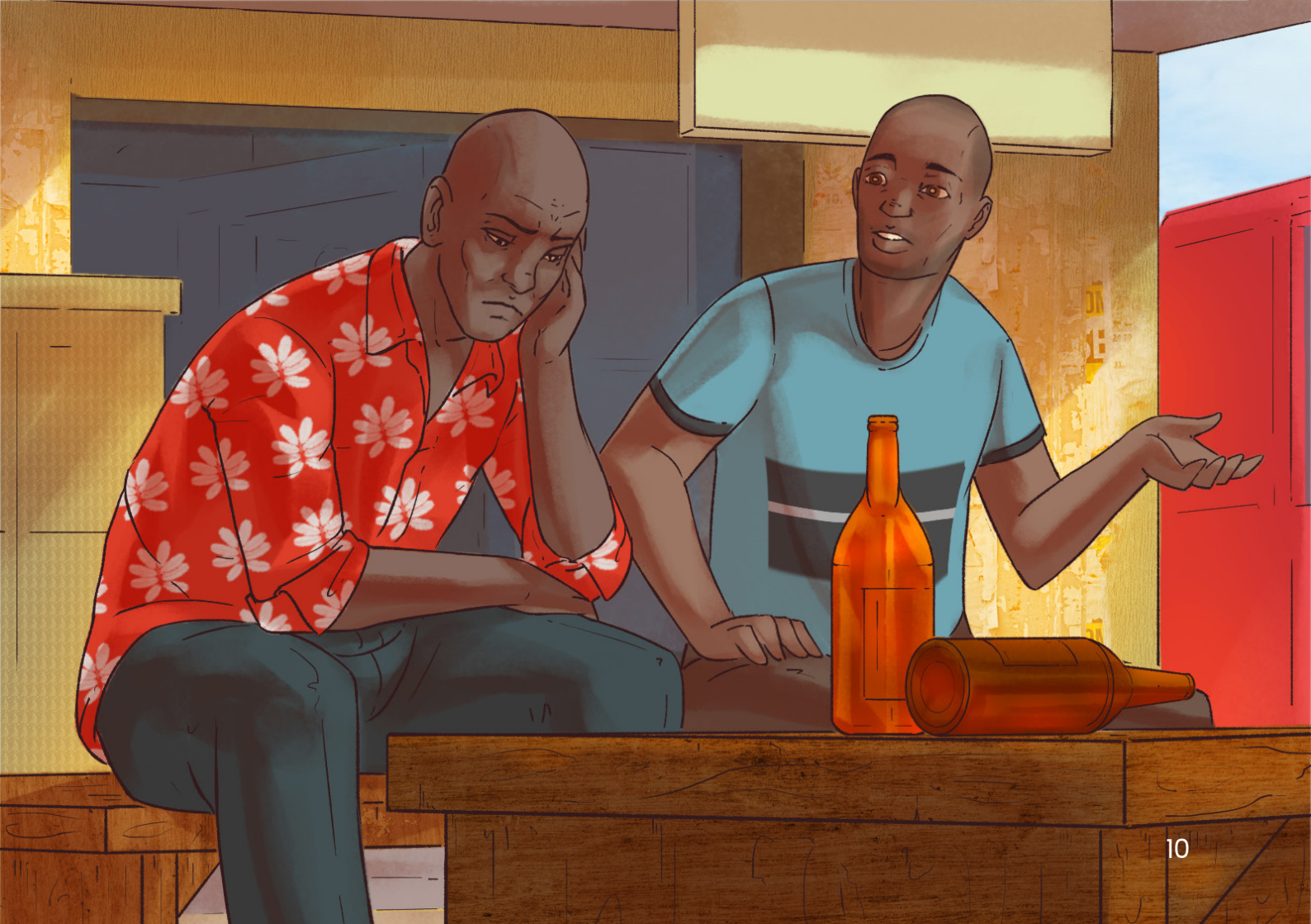
“What? Ayot the widow?” Orach wondered how Ayot had managed to grow such a lush farm of trees.

“Do you know how much money she could get if she sold those trees?” Orach asked. He dreamed of having a beautiful farm of trees like Ayot’s. Dinah shrugged and continued tilling the land.



Later in the afternoon, Orach went to the bar. Ouma noticed that Orach was unusually quiet that day. Ouma tried to ask him if there was something wrong, but Orach was lost in thought.

If a widow can do it, why can't I do it too? Orach thought to himself. He wanted to find what magic that Ayot had used to achieve her success. Ayot was a single mother who had lost her husband in an accident. She worked hard to raise her children on her own and send them to boarding schools. Orach continued to admire Ayot's tree farm. With each passing day, he dreamed more and more of owning a house as big as hers.



The next morning, Orach went to the bar early. On his way, he saw a group of women sitting under a big tree. He noticed Ayot among the women. They were planting seedlings in the soil.

Orach walked towards the women, keeping his distance from them and observing what they were doing from afar. Ayot noticed him and walked over.

“I want to ask you a question,” Orach said, so quietly that he was not sure Ayot heard him.

“Please do.”

“How did you manage to build that big house?”

“The money I make from selling trees helps me achieve my dreams,” Ayot responded.



Ayot was the group leader. She beckoned Orach to sit down.

“Why are you preparing a nursery bed?” he asked her, his voice close to a whisper.

“We are going to plant trees. We are supported by the Kijani project to grow our own trees. When these trees mature, we will harvest them and earn money,” Ayot responded.

“Money? How?” Orach was confused. He wondered why his wife was not participating in this project if it could help bring in money at home.

“If you can come back later, the extension worker will be around and will explain everything to you.”



Orach turned around and went back home.

“Where is your mother?” he asked the children.

“She is at the farm,” they answered.

Orach yawned and went inside to sleep. When he woke up later, he found Dinah preparing lunch. He greeted her and told her about the women he had seen preparing the nursery bed.

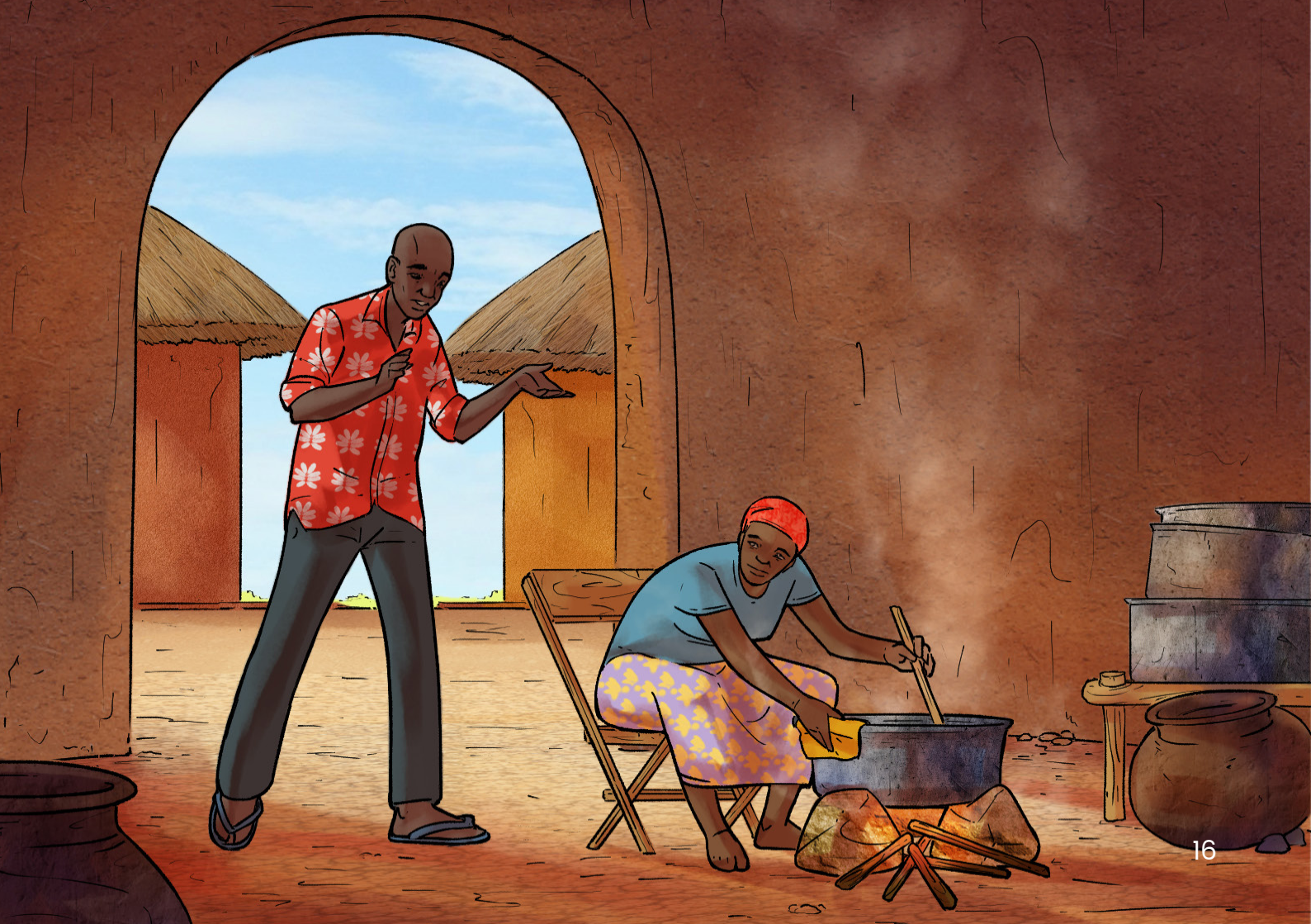
“I’ve seen them before,” Dinah said. “I just don’t have enough time to join.”

Orach was shocked.

“What?” he asked.

“I have to do everything around here, remember?” Dinah shouted.

“I am sorry,” Orach said. “Let’s go and meet the extension worker together.”



After lunch, Orach and Dinah joined the meeting with the extension worker and the other women in the community.

“We partner with rural communities who are interested in tree planting. We provide trainings, tree seedlings, and a market for agroforestry products,” the extension worker explained. “This is an opportunity for you to create generational wealth for your families.”

“Can I join the project?” Orach asked.

“Yes, but you need to join a group and make time to do all the activities together. You will also need a piece of land where you will plant the trees,” Ayot answered.



“If you work with family, it will be easier for you to plan and you will get more work done,” the extension worker advised. Orach was the only man present. He knew that the other men in the community would laugh at him, but he wanted to build a big house for his family.

Orach already had some unused land he could use to plant the trees on. He planned to work with Dinah to till the land and get it ready for planting the trees.



By the time Orach arrived at the bar, all his friends had already gathered. Some of them were already drunk. Ouma called Orach over to sit next to him. “Where have you been all day?” Ouma asked.

“I was in a meeting. Did you know that there’s a project that can help us earn our own money?” Orach asked Ouma. “It is called the Kijani project.”

“Yes, I do. But it is a women’s thing. The women love gossiping as they do the work, and besides, it takes a long time for the money to come in. That’s why I spend my time driving a boda boda so that I can provide for my family,” Ouma replied.

Orach was lost in thought. He drank some of Ouma’s drink and went back home.



The next morning, Orach woke up early and went with Dinah to the farm. As they weeded the cassava, Orach discussed his plan with Dinah. “You see that land near Ayot’s? That is where we shall plant our trees,” Orach said.

Dinah nodded. “When we start getting money, we shall buy an ox to help us on the farm.” She smiled.

“We will be able to send our children to school,” Orach said. They weeded until the sun was in the middle of the sky and went back home.



After having lunch, Orach and Dinah joined the women and attended a training on how to prepare a nursery bed. The training was interesting. Orach and Dinah asked questions on what they did not understand and the extension worker answered them.

What interested Orach most about the project was the possibility of having a ready market for the by-products of the trees they were going to grow. Kijani would provide a market for the timber and charcoal harvested from their gardens.

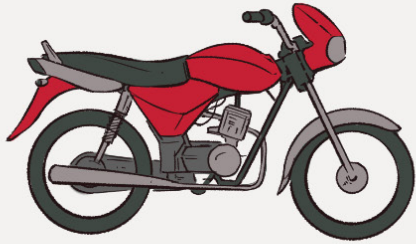
Over the next few weeks, Orach and Dinah worked together to prepare the land where they would transfer the seedlings. Orach still went to the bar sometimes to meet up with his friends, who laughed at him for working in the company of women.



Orach and Dinah worked hard on their farm. After they harvested their crops, they had extra food and Orach sold some to get money. He used some of this money to buy household necessities and the rest for his evening drinks.

Orach and Dinah worked hard to prepare their farm together. They worked diligently in the nursery, taking care of the seedlings, weeding and sorting them so that they would be of good quality when it came time to plant.

Orach now knew these activities should not just be for women, but for a husband and wife to do together to support their household. He wished that the other men knew the same.



One day at the bar, Orach's friends would not stop laughing at him for joining the Kijani project. Orach just smiled and spoke to them calmly.

"Working together with my wife is a lot of fun. It has helped me get back on my feet. My wife and I have earned more money by helping each other than I ever earned while working on my own. Besides, I don't have the burden of making all the decisions alone," he said.

"Decisions? Why do you let your wife make decisions for you?" Ouma asked.

"She doesn't make the decisions by herself. We make them together," Orach responded.

One of his friends understood.

"Your life really has changed. Your children even wear school uniforms to school," he said to Orach.



A few years later, Orach and Dinah started cutting some of their trees' branches to make firewood to sell at the local market. With the money they earned, they bought everything they needed to raise their children. Their children grew up smart and healthy.

Ouma could not believe it. He noticed that Orach had stopped borrowing money from his friends, drank less alcohol, and bought his own drinks. Orach was also not fighting with his wife at home any more.

Ouma joined the project with his wife.



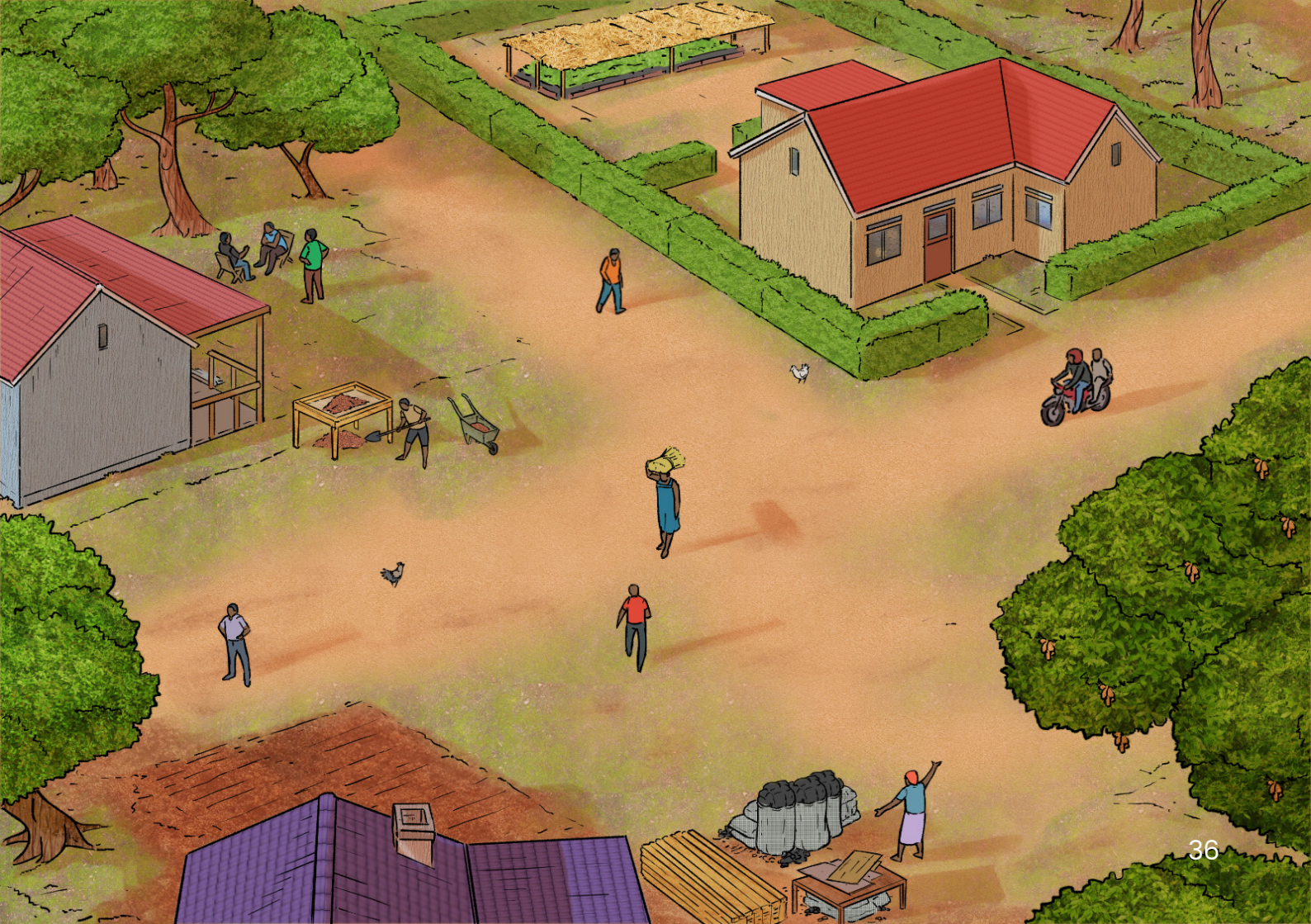
Soon Orach and his wife were harvesting even more trees and made charcoal and timber. Orach used the money they earned to build a store for Dinah. Dinah sold charcoal and fruit at her stall. The local people loved buying charcoal from Dinah's store because it was of good quality and lasted for a long time.

Orach and Dinah were earning a steady income for their family. They continued participating in the Kijani project. When they had saved enough money, they constructed a very big house. The people in the village that had laughed at Orach developed a great admiration for all he had achieved.



Orach encouraged his friends and the other men in the village to join the project. Many of them joined and started working together with their wives in planning and making decisions for their families. Some of the men even helped their wives with housework.

Families throughout the village planted a lot of trees while working together. They soon had a lot of food in their homesteads and their children and animals always looked healthy.



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