

# ANNUAL

BULLETIN

20  
24



**BPN**   
Business Professionals Network





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Inspire

Challenge

Transform

Towards Sound Entrepreneurship in Rwanda

# Empowering entrepreneurs for inclusive and sustainable growth



## Dear entrepreneurs, partners, and friends of BPN Rwanda,

As we embark on another impactful year, I am pleased to present the 2024 edition of BPN Rwanda's bulletin. This past year has been one of growth, resilience, and transformation. Through our commitment to empowering Rwandan entrepreneurs, we have strengthened businesses, created sustainable jobs, and contributed to a dynamic private sector.

At BPN Rwanda, we believe that entrepreneurship is a powerful catalyst for economic development. Our mission extends beyond business growth; we are committed to developing ethical, visionary leaders who build sustainable companies that stand the test of time.

In 2024, we expanded our reach, deepened our impact, and strengthened our programs to foster greater **inclusivity**, not only within our organization but also among the entrepreneurs we support. We partnered with organizations that assist refugees and individuals with disabilities, renovated our facilities to enhance accessibility for all, and introduced a dedicated space for babies and toddlers on our premises.

Though we remain sector-agnostic, in 2024, BPN Rwanda in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation embarked on a promising journey to strengthen the **tourism** and **hospitality** sector, including **agriculture**. Recognizing the significant role these industries play in economic growth and job creation, we launched targeted initiatives to equip entrepreneurs with the skills, resources, and networks needed to enhance their businesses. This year, we continue to build on that momentum.

Our key priorities for 2025 include:

- ✓ **Enhancing Entrepreneurial Coaching** – Strengthening our coaching approach by providing more intensive support and addressing the tough realities that hinder business growth.
- ✓ **Strengthening Strategic Partnerships** – Collaborating with key stakeholders to create more opportunities for entrepreneurs.
- ✓ **Expanding Our Reach** – Bringing BPN's proven methodology to more entrepreneurs across Rwanda, through the BPN Rwanda Musanze branch.

In this bulletin, you will find inspiring stories of entrepreneurs who have transformed their businesses through BPN, insights from our expert coaches, and updates on our programs and initiatives. We hope that these stories encourage and energize you, just as they continue to inspire us.

Thank you to our partners, coaches, and the entire BPN Rwanda community for your invaluable support. Together, we are shaping the future of Rwandan entrepreneurship.

Warm regards,

**Alice Nkulikiyinka**

Country Director  
BPN Rwanda

# Empowering women entrepreneurs through tailored coaching

What limiting beliefs might be stopping you from pursuing bigger goals? What risks or judgments are you avoiding? What would it take to face these head-on? What would it take to turn your dreams into actionable, achievable goals?

Hello! My name is Happy. I am a business coach and I encourage you not to dismiss these questions. Please pause and reflect to find your real answers. I've seen questions like these transform the lives and businesses of various entrepreneurs, men and women, youth and non-youth, from different backgrounds and fields, but in this article, I'll only talk about something that is very close to my heart: the immersive growth and transformation I've witnessed in women entrepreneurs.

Historically, in many cultures across the globe, systems and cultures sidelined women, reinforcing the idea that women had little agency over their own lives. While significant progress has been made in empowering women, some remnants of these patterns linger as confidence gaps, fear of self-expression, decision-making hesitations, and a need for external validation. Today, with great empowerment systems through various governmental and organizational initiatives in Rwanda, we've seen women take bold, impressive steps, achieving incredible things and thriving in areas once deemed unattainable.

At first, I didn't know why. I thought it might be innate strength and resilience. While that may play a role, I learnt something even more concrete:

**"Behind every successful woman, there is self-doubt overcome, limiting beliefs abandoned, and sharpened self-confidence and resilience"**



I learned this a few years ago when I joined BPN and fell in love with its mission. Initially, I heard it in stories. Then I experienced it firsthand through a personalized growth journey and saw with my own eyes how transformations unfold and blossom in entrepreneurs. It is a heartwarming experience. I'll give you just a glimpse of what goes on behind the scenes.

At the core of impactful coaching lies a simple yet profound act: active listening.

Think back to a time when you felt worried, stressed, frustrated, or overwhelmingly excited about an opportunity. Someone gave you their undivided attention, no interruptions and no judgment, just genuine interest. They asked a thought-provoking question, listened, then asked another question and listened again. What happened? The noise in your mind quieted, and as you reflected and responded, solutions began to emerge. You get the picture.

At BPN, this coaching approach has empowered women entrepreneurs to reflect deeply on their purpose, align business goals with core values, and create meaningful impact. By fostering clarity, overcoming challenges, and strengthening resilience, coaching has helped them move forward with renewed purpose.

This method works because it is individualized and customized. It means working closely with each entrepreneur and actively listening to understand their unique journey, challenges, and aspirations. It is never a one-size-fits-all approach, nor is it about simply providing information, tools, or strategies. Every entrepreneur's circumstances and breakthrough moments are different, because no two journeys are the same.



For some women, coaching has been indispensable in navigating biological challenges, helping them identify tailored strategies to maintain thriving businesses while on maternity leave or adjusting to postpartum life. For others, it has been instrumental in overcoming gender biases that hinder business growth and family harmony. Through coaching, these women have developed confidence-backed communication strategies that enable them to balance business and family for mutual success.

Coaching provides a sanctuary for self-discovery, builds confidence, and empowers individuals to take decisive action, leading to remarkable results. The impact was evident throughout 2024.

The growth of BPN's coaching team mirrors the success of our entrepreneurs. In 2024, we expanded our dedicated team and strengthened internal systems to enhance coaching effectiveness, growing as you grow, succeeding only when you succeed.

One key lesson from the past year: Success is never a solo journey. Your success is our shared goal. We see your potential and are here to support you as you overcome challenges, take bold steps, and achieve boundless success.

Be mindful in designing your support system: choose people who align with your goals, inspire you, and possess the right competence and mindset to steer you in the right direction. With the right people beside you and the strength within you, the possibilities are limitless.

**Happy Mignonne Agatako**

*Business Coach  
BPN Rwanda*

# Who's missing? Rethinking entrepreneurship through inclusion

I am thrilled to have joined BPN last year as the Gender and Social Inclusion Specialist. You may wonder, "What does gender and inclusion have to do with empowering entrepreneurs?" The answer lies at the core of everything we do.

At BPN, we believe that to make a meaningful impact, we must address the unique needs of the diverse entrepreneurs we serve: women, youth, men, persons with disabilities, and individuals from underserved communities. Each person faces distinct challenges and opportunities, making it essential to tailor our approach to ensure no one is left behind. Integrating gender and social inclusion allows us to refine our programs and ensure equal opportunities for all.

Consider Sabina, a young mother attending training sessions at our Business Academy. Balancing motherhood and entrepreneurship can be overwhelming, so we added a nursing room at our training center, a welcoming space where she can care for her baby while pursuing her dreams.



Or think about Xavier, a hearing-impaired entrepreneur attending one of our events. By hiring a sign language interpreter, we're not just ensuring accessibility, we're reinforcing a message: You are welcome. Your voice matters. Your potential is limitless.

**"Change doesn't happen on its own. It takes all of us."**

These efforts push us to ask tough questions: Are we reaching everyone who is eligible? Are we bold enough to innovate and adapt to ensure inclusivity? Addressing these challenges isn't just about fairness: it's about driving economic growth. According to the World Economic Forum, closing gender gaps in the workforce could add \$12 trillion to global GDP by 2025. Women-led businesses generate 20% more revenue per dollar of investment than those led by men, yet many women, youth, and marginalized groups still struggle to access the resources and networks they need to succeed.

At BPN, we apply a gender and social inclusion lens to everything we do because every entrepreneur's journey is unique. A young woman with hearing impairments launching her first business in Kigali faces different challenges than a man running an established enterprise in Musanze. By understanding these nuances, we tailor our programs to meet specific needs, ensuring inclusivity.



As entrepreneurs, you have the power to lead this change. Ask yourself: Are your products, services, and hiring practices truly inclusive? Gender and social inclusion aren't just ideals. They are strategies for building stronger businesses and communities.

Taking action might mean hiring a diverse team, making your workplace accessible, or designing products that serve a broader audience. Inclusion creates real value for your business, customers, and society.

As we begin a new year and set our goals, I encourage you to reflect on the small steps you can take to foster inclusivity in your business and daily life. It may not always be easy, but together, we can create an entrepreneurial community where everyone has the chance to thrive.

Let's challenge ourselves to rethink how we work and lead. Together, we can build a future where every entrepreneur reaches their full potential.

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Change doesn't happen on its own, it takes all of us.  
As entrepreneurs, you have the power to lead this change.”

**Clementine Nyirarukundo**  
Gender and Social Inclusion Specialist  
BPN Rwanda

# Breaking barriers in tourism

## The story of Judith Safaris

My journey into this business started with an unexpected moment: I saw a woman driving a taxi. It was something I had never seen before, and it sparked a fire in me. I knew then that I wanted to learn how to drive.

I'm Judith Uwimana, owner of Judith Safaris, a company offering immersive tourism experiences in Rwanda. I earned my driver's license in 2012, but my journey began in 2009 when I bought my first car from a Dutch family. I didn't realize it at the time, but that was the start of Judith Safaris.

Tourism is competitive, with many companies offering similar services. What sets us apart is our commitment to women's empowerment. When I entered the industry, most tour guides were men. I wanted to change that. Today, 90% of our tour guides are women, something I'm incredibly proud of. Breaking into the industry wasn't easy. People doubted me, questioning whether a woman could lead a two-week tour across East Africa. I proved them wrong by showing up and sharing my journey on social media to inspire other women.



Challenges like securing capital, navigating tourism seasons, and retaining staff persist. It's frustrating to train someone only for them to leave for a bigger company. But thanks to BPN's guidance, I've learned to manage these challenges and build a sustainable business.

Beyond Judith Safaris, I own Fika Café, where visitors experience local cuisine. We also run a "Sunday Market" program, giving local artisans and farmers a free space to showcase their products while promoting them on social media. Having come from a rural area, I know the struggles of small businesses, which is why I strive to give back.

Tourism isn't just about seeing beautiful places; it's about culture. At Judith Safaris, we offer experiences like visiting tea and coffee plantations, joining farmers in their daily work, and learning to cook traditional Rwandan food. These activities educate tourists while supporting local businesses.

I owe 90% of my success to BPN Rwanda. Before joining, I had no business structure, carried materials everywhere, and made decisions without proper planning. I even had to close my business multiple times. BPN's training and mentorship changed everything, helping me run my business the right way. Today, I see the results.



In the next five to ten years, I aim to improve our services and expand globally by securing agents in Europe and the U.S. More importantly, I want my business to stand for something. That's why I'm working on starting a foundation to support women. I want Judith Safaris to be more than a business: it should be a force for change in tourism, for women, and for communities in Rwanda.

If you want your business to last, think long-term. Short-term decisions can hurt you later. Dream big, take risks, keep learning, find mentors, be honest, and build strong networks. When you do that, opportunities will come.

*If you want your business to last, think long-term. Dream big, take risks, keep learning, find mentors, be honest, and build strong networks.*

**Judith Uwimana**  
Entrepreneur  
Founder of Judith Safaris



# Supporting Rwanda's gazelles

## The Topify program



While many programs support startups and early-stage companies, there has been little available in Rwanda for "gazelles", longer established, medium-sized, high-growth companies. These companies have faced various trials and shocks, building resilience through their experiences, which makes them crucial pillars of our economy. The Topify program was designed to support these vital businesses in reaching even greater heights.

Gazelle companies are those that are focusing on scaling, and the Topify program helps them do so sustainably. Scaling varies for each entrepreneur, whether entering new markets, adding new product lines, or otherwise. Ultimately, those businesses must stabilize some aspects, adjust, or redefine other parts of the business to handle scaling effectively, and that's where the program comes in.

The Topify program was launched at the end of 2023, with a first cohort of 20 entrepreneurs . These entrepreneurs represent diverse industries and backgrounds, including tourism, hospitality, health, tech, education, and multimedia, with 55% of them being women. Their businesses, which have been operating for an average of 10 years, span a variety of industries and markets. Despite their diversity, it has been insightful to observe the similar challenges they often face when it comes to scaling.



These shared experiences have enabled us to refine the program to address scaling needs more effectively, ensuring we provide targeted support such as coaching, actionable insights, and technical assistance in establishing robust systems and processes to help participants overcome these barriers. Additionally, the program fosters peer-to-peer learning by facilitating the exchange of ideas and best practices through interactive workshops and networking opportunities.

Some entrepreneurs reported significant growth within the first year, with an average annual revenue increase of 21.2% compared to 2023. Many have developed a better grasp of key business areas such as finances and operations, gaining greater clarity and control. This has enabled them to lead their businesses more effectively by focusing on strategic priorities.

This shift has also empowered them to equip their teams with the tools needed to perform better in their roles and support the business in scaling.

Connecting gazelle entrepreneurs to the international community is one of the key activities of the gazelle program. During the early phases of the program, Topify hosted a networking event with 20 members of TWIN Global, a collaborative platform established in 2003 that brings together nearly 3,000 innovators and leaders from over 30 countries across various sectors. It provided an excellent opportunity for the Rwandan gazelle companies to connect with global business leaders.

Another highlight was a session with the Chairman of the Rwanda Development Board (RDB), Mr. Itzhak, a seasoned entrepreneur and investor. He shared valuable insights from his journey and engaged with entrepreneurs about industry challenges, providing them with an opportunity to voice their concerns to someone who can influence policy discussions.

This year, Topify is welcoming its second cohort of entrepreneurs, and we're excited to build on the progress made with the first group. Together, we look forward to empowering these businesses reach even greater heights. Topify and BPN have a lot in store for our entrepreneurs this year.

Stay tuned!

**Denise Ingabire**  
Topify Program Coordinator  
BPN Rwanda

## If you're looking for funding, get your business in order first.

My name is Mukamana Immaculée, co-owner of Nyamurinda Coffee Growers. My sister and I started this company in 2013 in Rwanda's Southern Province. Initially, we focused on growing coffee, but we later invested in a processing machine, not just for our coffee, but to help other growers as well.

From the start, we prioritized women's involvement at every stage of production. Many women, especially those affected by the Genocide Against the Tutsi, faced isolation. We wanted our business to be more than a source of income; it had to be a place of support. Through our company, women have a stable market for their coffee and access to agronomists for guidance on improving their yields.

I learned about the Investment Readiness Program through BPN's partnership with Rugori Investment Network (RIN), and I will always be grateful for that opportunity. The program gave me confidence, helping me see that being a woman in business is not a disadvantage. I realized I had the skills to run my business successfully without relying on others.

Through the program, I refined my business plan, strengthened my staff training, and analyzed my financials more closely. Understanding my numbers was crucial before approaching investors.



One of the biggest lessons I learned was how to identify weaknesses in my business and find solutions. We also received training on pitching to investors, something I had never done before. Learning to present my business in a way that attracts investment was a game-changer.

At the pitching festival organized by BPN Rwanda and Rugori Investment Network, we had the chance to pitch our business to several investors. After presenting our business, we caught the attention of several investors and eventually secured a \$130,000 loan with SHONA Capital. This funding allowed us to scale our operations.

One of the most valuable insights I gained was the importance of customer feedback. Previously, I didn't pay much attention to it, but I've since learned that listening to customers is key to growth. For example, I realized that quality matters deeply to coffee buyers, so we implemented a system where we taste our coffee before selling it. This ensures we consistently deliver the best product.

While our business model remained largely the same, we worked closely with banks to navigate financial challenges. The most critical takeaway? A strong business plan is essential for growth, without it, attracting the right investors is nearly impossible.



If you're looking for funding, my advice is simple: get your business in order first. Many entrepreneurs seek investment before they're ready. Ensure your operations are running smoothly and you have a clear growth plan before approaching investors. Since completing the program, our business has been running more efficiently, largely because we better understand our customers' needs. We introduced more coffee varieties and set up a cupping lab to evaluate quality before our coffee reaches the market. Now, we're planning to open a cupping lab in Kigali, allowing clients to taste the coffee before purchasing, part of our strategy to expand our market and build closer relationships with customers.

We're also investing in staff training and skills development. Another major goal is shifting towards organic coffee. Organic coffee sells faster, tastes better, and meets the growing demand for high-quality products.

Looking ahead, I see a bright future for Nyamurinda Coffee Growers. With the right mindset, investment, and commitment to quality, I believe we can continue growing and making a lasting impact in the coffee industry.

**Immaculée Mukamana**

*Entrepreneur*  
NYAMURINDA Coffee Growers

# From Thun, Switzerland to Bigogwe, Rwanda: A cross-cultural exchange shaping Rwanda's tourism

In May 2024, a group of Swiss students from the renowned Tourism School of Thun (TFBO) arrived in Rwanda. They were not tourists. They were on a mission of sharing and giving. Their journey, part of a collaboration between TFBO and BPN, brought them to six Rwandan tourism and hospitality businesses. One of those businesses was Red Rocks Rwanda, a community tourism initiative owned by Greg Bakunzi, located in Musanze. Over several days, the students immersed themselves in the operations, professionally assessing the services provided, offering fresh perspectives on customer service, marketing, and sustainable tourism practices.

For Greg, the experience was transformative. Their insights were practical and actionable, and the honest feedback challenged him to think differently about his business. Inspired, he started crafting a bold action plan for 2025: one that embraces innovation, sustainability, and collaboration.

Greg wasn't the only one impacted. The Swiss students left with stories of Rwandan resilience and creativity, and a deeper understanding of community-centered tourism. "We learned as much as we shared," one student remarked, reflecting on the exchange of ideas and culture that enriched both sides. The value of collaboration was undeniable, and it sparked something bigger. This wasn't just about a one-time visit; it was about planting seeds for long-term growth. Through tailored coaching from BPN, the entrepreneurs began implementing the recommendations shared by the advisors.



Rigobert Uwiduhaye, the visionary behind SAWA, found himself dreaming of new possibilities after working intensively with the Swiss students. He started exploring how to combine wildlife conservation, eco-tourism, and art in ways that would not only elevate his business but also leave a meaningful impact on the community. The exchange highlighted a powerful truth: growth happens when people share knowledge and support one another. For BPN, it underscored the importance of partnerships. Sector specific interventions offered by experts in the field, allow to intensify BPN's impact. Inspired by these successes, BPN began crafting its plans for 2025 with a clear mission: to empower Rwandan SMEs to lead the tourism and hospitality industry into a sustainable future.

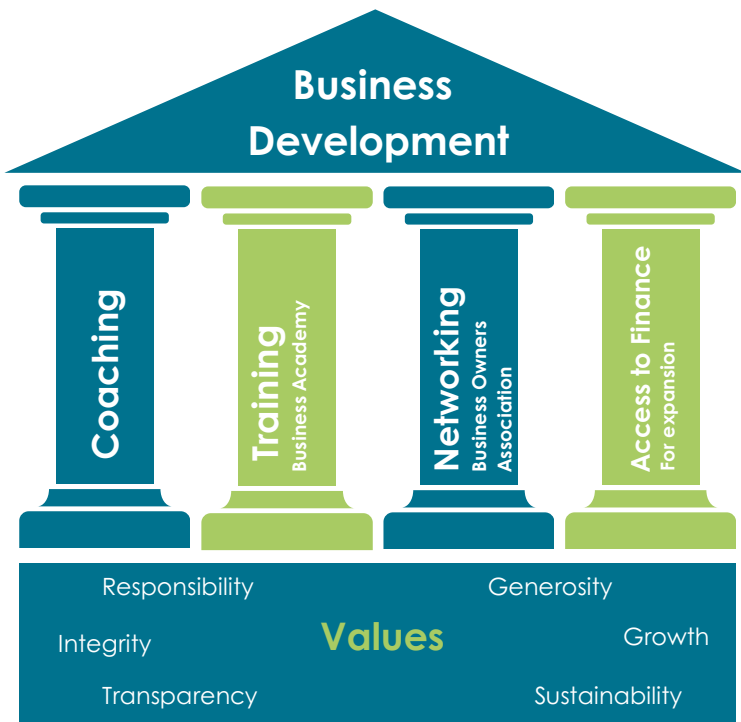


**Grace Lauren Umutoni**  
Tourism and Hospitality Specialist  
BPN Rwanda



**Christelle Irakoze Bayigamba**  
Senior Programs Officer  
BPN Rwanda

“ The main objective of BPN is to reduce unemployment by fostering entrepreneurship. The vision of BPN is therefore to create as many sustainable and dignifying jobs as possible, hence having an impact on the sustainable development of the business sector, and eventually the development of the country as a whole.



Towards Sound Entrepreneurship in Rwanda

# Impact 2011 - 2024

Entrepreneurs supported

839

Jobs supported

7,530

Jobs created

11,789

## 2024 Facts & Figures

**24**

Nr. of Seminars

**20**

Nr. of Workshops

**519**

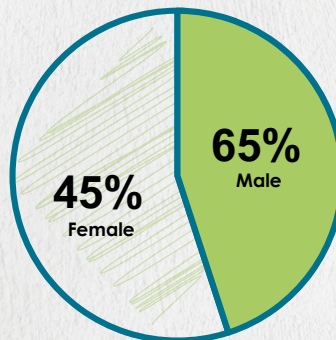
Nr. of Participants

**28**

BPN Core program  
Participants

**102**

Partner Program  
Participants



Program Participants  
by Gender

## BPN RWANDA - ADVISORY BOARD



Mr. Faustin Mbundu



Ms. Maryse Mbonyumutwa



Mr. Vincent Mugisha



Mr. Hansjürg Emch



Mrs. Rosette Rugamba



Ms. Izere Laure Bella Ange

### **BPN Rwanda welcomes its newly appointed advisory board!**

We are excited to announce the official onboarding of our Advisory Board, a distinguished group of visionary leaders dedicated to empowering entrepreneurs and driving meaningful impact. In December, the board held its inaugural meeting, aligning on our vision, exchanging invaluable insights, and setting a strategic course for sustainable growth and innovation.

This milestone marks a pivotal moment for BPN Rwanda as we strengthen our mission to support entrepreneurs, create dignified jobs, and contribute to a thriving economy. Together, we are building a future where businesses flourish and communities prosper.

## The stories the numbers are telling

Four years ago, I received a phone call from a former University acquaintance who had recently emigrated from Switzerland to Kigali. The vision and mission of BPN in Rwanda immediately had me intrigued. BPN was looking for an experienced business person to come twice a year to Rwanda to train entrepreneurs on finance management.

I am Swiss, an engineer by training with over 20 years in the Medical Technology Industry in the United States and Europe. I later transitioned to managing our family business, which specializes in designing and manufacturing highly specialized elevators. In addition, I coach start-up companies in Switzerland, sharing my expertise to help them grow and thrive.

Full disclosure: I am not a finance expert. I never studied finance in school and, to be honest, I never really liked bookkeeping! But as a CEO and entrepreneur, I had to learn out of necessity by doing. Over time, I became fascinated by how a few key numbers can reveal how a company is performing and where it's heading. They help anticipate both opportunities and challenges ahead.

A successful CEO is like the pilot of a plane: with the right instruments in the cockpit, the ability to read the measurements, and an understanding of what they mean, the pilot can navigate through any storm. And as we all know... bad weather always comes.

I have now had the privilege of teaching six seminars for BPN Rwanda. The interaction with Rwandan entrepreneurs has been incredibly rewarding. I've met so many remarkable women and men with sharp business instincts and the tenacity to persevere.



Though these entrepreneurs lead small and medium-sized companies, their businesses play a significant role in driving the local economy through creating jobs, paying salaries, and contributing taxes. They are the true engines of growth in Rwanda's economy. True heroes!

As an example, there is this awe-inspiring man who started his business by extracting clay from his own land and firing it into bricks, a fairly common undertaking. But being a sharp businessman, he didn't stop there. He planted bananas on the vacant land and later built a distillery to produce banana wine. To maximize the distillery's capacity, he started buying ginger and expanded into making ginger-based products.

Not stopping there, he rented a hillside to extract and crush stones, along with a riverbed to collect sand. And because he's resourceful and strategic, he acquired lorries to transport his bricks, stones, and sand to his customers. When I last visited him, his thriving enterprise was providing income to over 200 families!

Courageous men and women who take the initiative to start a bakery, a clothing design brand, a shoe cobbler, a brewery, a tent manufacturer, beauty and hygiene products, software... the list keeps going and growing.

Inevitably, as the entrepreneurs grow their companies without having knowledge of the basics of finance management, they eventually hit a ceiling. They may need a loan from the bank to expand their business, but the bank wants to see a business plan, a profit and loss statement and a balance sheet.



The goal is not to turn the entrepreneurs into finance experts. But they must know what numbers are important to measure – and how to read the story they are telling. They must be able to convert their business vision into the financial targets of a business plan and to supervise the progress the company is making.

Before each seminar, I take a few days to visit former and future participants. That allows me to continuously improve the program and match it to their practical needs. The participants learn the most when we discuss their own practical challenges in class. For example, the clay stone maker who wants to know which of his different products are the most profitable (Gross Profit Margin). Or the safari entrepreneur who needs to know the minimum number of tourists needed to make the trip profitable (Break Even). The fashion designer, who doesn't know how to set the right price for his custom-made products (Single Product Costing). Or we learn from our own mistakes, such as buying a cheap machine without thinking of spare parts and the cost of maintenance (Investment and Amortization). I also like to discuss challenges that my own company faces.

BPN's goal is not merely to impart technical knowledge but to instill core values such as personal integrity, social responsibility, and long-term thinking. The discussions deliberately go beyond the numbers. The exchange between entrepreneurs about the loneliness at the top, the reasons for a board of directors as a sounding board, the importance of having company goals and the involvement and participation of the employees in the profits of the company are an integral part of the four-day seminar. Thanks to its courageous, energetic people and its economic policies, Rwanda is on the right track to prosperity. Step-by-step, in a sustainable manner, Rwanda and its entrepreneurs are building a strong foundation to become an economically healthy country. What an exciting journey! I always look forward to coming back.

**Hansjürg Emch**

*Entrepreneur, Finance Management Trainer  
Member of the BPN Rwanda Advisory Board*

# Building stronger businesses together: Business Owners Association (BOA)

My name is Uwamahoro Ernestine, an entrepreneur and proud member of the Business Owners Association (BOA). After completing BPN's training program, a group of us, entrepreneurs, realized the importance of staying connected, sharing ideas, and collaborating on various initiatives. This led to the formation of the BOA: a community of like-minded business owners with shared goals and a commitment to growth.

One of the main reasons I joined BOA was the invaluable support system it offers. The training we received helped us transition from chaotic business practices to structured, efficient operations. I couldn't imagine losing my connection with my peers, so becoming part of the association was an easy decision. BOA meetings go beyond discussions: we address real business challenges and find practical solutions together. A key highlight is our study trips, both locally and internationally, which provide hands-on learning experiences that a classroom cannot offer.

In 2023, we visited Uganda, where we engaged with various business owners. Hearing their stories, understanding their challenges, and seeing their operations firsthand was eye-opening.

These exchanges broaden our perspectives and equip us with valuable insights to apply in our own businesses.



Study trips within Rwanda have also been transformative. For instance, we visited Abusol Ltd, a poultry farming business, where the owner shared insights on sustainable farming practices and employee training for increased productivity. At Polybags Rwanda, we learned how the business scaled operations to a 24/7 workforce despite challenges. Another visit to Dove International Montessori School introduced us to the Montessori education model and its impact in Rwanda.

Hearing these testimonies from fellow entrepreneurs is inspiring. When faced with struggles in our own businesses, their stories remind us to keep pushing forward.

Having gained knowledge from local business visits, we now aim to learn from a developed market. Switzerland is home to many successful businesses, and we believe this visit will offer best practices and strategies to help us grow. We approach this opportunity with curiosity and an eagerness to absorb new knowledge.

Beyond business growth, BOA is committed to making a difference. During the Genocide commemoration period, we pooled our resources to support vulnerable women, understanding that empowering them creates a ripple effect within their families and communities.



Visit to Toddle Care

One of BOA's biggest initiatives is The Magnet Institute (TMI), a school created by SMEs for SMEs. We recognized that one of the greatest challenges that business owners face is untrained employees who struggle to meet performance expectations. Instead of constantly addressing this issue individually, we established TMI to provide structured capacity building. With TMI, business owners can focus on big-picture growth while their employees gain the skills and confidence needed for effective operations.

If you've completed the BPN program and demonstrate strong business potential, BOA is the perfect next step. Membership provides access to a powerful network, training opportunities for employees, study tours, and a support system that is invaluable for any entrepreneur. The benefits go far beyond individual growth. Together, we are building stronger businesses and a thriving community.

BOA is more than just an association: it's a movement that helps businesses thrive and leaves a lasting impact. What we've achieved so far is just the beginning, and we are excited about the opportunities ahead.

**Uwamahoro Ernestine**

*Entrepreneur, Founder of Lamane Bakery  
Business Owners Association (BOA)*

## Tailored training and innovative solutions for SMEs by SMEs (TMI)

Founded in 2022 by Rwandan entrepreneurs, The Magnet Institute addresses critical business management challenges through customized training for middle managers tailored to the Rwandan context. In partnership with SFB, a Swiss training organization, the institute focuses on bridging the gap between business owners and frontline staff. By combining practical approaches with sector-specific knowledge, it equips participants with skills for personal and organizational growth. The institute continually adapts its methods to meet evolving business needs, delivering impactful training that addresses universal and client-specific challenges for long-term success. The key initiatives the organization put in place are as follows:



- **Tailored programs based on special needs:** The Magnet Institute designs customized training programs for middle managers, shaped by needs assessments and collaboration with Rwandan entrepreneurs. Leveraging Swiss expertise and strategic partnerships, these programs address local challenges with world-class quality and relevance. This process includes:
- **Surveys and interviews:** Engaging directly with managers to understand their challenges, expectations and goals.
- **Competency mapping:** Identifying gaps in skills and knowledge that are critical for success to address during the training.
- **Feedback analysis:** Reviewing feedback from previous training sessions to enhance content relevance.

Examples of tailored programs include:

1. **Effective communication training:**  
Focused on enhancing decision-making, conflict resolution, and team-building skills.
2. **Personal management training:**  
Equipping managers with tools to lead organizational transformations effectively.
3. **Understanding business finance:**  
Building financial literacy, budgeting skills to help participants effectively manage resources and drive business growth.
4. **Sector - specific training for entrepreneurs:** Recognizing the diverse needs of entrepreneurs across industries, the organization has developed sector-specific training modules blending core management principles with industry-specific insights. Key sectors targeted include:
  - **Hospitality - Enhancing service excellence:** focused on guest relations, operational efficiency, and customer service excellence.
  - **Manufacturing - Lean for managers:** this program on optimizing processes, minimizing waste through lean methodologies, and enhancing productivity.
  - **Training for staff development:** In addition to middle managers, the organization also focuses on staff-level training to foster a culture of continuous improvement and upskilling by ensuring alignment between managerial goals and team performance.



Programs offered include:

- **Customer Service Excellence:** Training frontline staff to enhance customer interactions and satisfaction.
- **Technical Skills Development:** Sector-specific technical training to improve job proficiency.
- **Soft Skills Training:** Enhancing communication, teamwork, and adaptability among employees.
- **6 months program:** Focused on building leadership, optimizing operations, and enhancing customer satisfaction to drive organizational success.



2024 PROJECTS

GROW 2 SCALE	I ACCELERATOR VI AGUKA IMALI	CORE PROGRAM
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# 2024 Implementing Partners



Grow 2 Scale





## BPN Rwanda Team

*Towards Sound Entrepreneurship in Rwanda*

# WORKING AT BPN RWANDA



**Joy Stella Mbabazi**

*Junior Training Officer*

As a Junior Training Officer at BPN, I ensure training sessions run smoothly, from material preparation to fostering an environment where entrepreneurs can succeed. Supported by clear guidance, teamwork, and tools, I help design inclusive programs that cater to diverse needs. BPN's culture, built on trust, honesty, and passion, enables me to empower entrepreneurs to create meaningful change for their families and communities.

## Ownership



As an HR professional at BPN, I create a supportive environment where employees feel valued and empowered to grow. Guided by fairness, integrity, and professionalism, I ensure HR practices align with BPN's values. BPN supports employees with benefits like counseling, allowances, training, and team-bonding activities such as coffee breaks and quarterly conviviality events. My work fosters inclusivity through equitable HR practices, open communication platforms like "Ask HR anything" and initiatives like the "Employee Spotlight," inspiring employees and entrepreneurs alike. BPN's culture emphasizes growth, inclusivity, and compassion, enabling everyone to thrive and contribute meaningfully.

## Integrity



**Juliette Mwezi**

*Head of HR*

## Entrepreneur Centricity



**Sandra Kamikazi**

*Senior Programs Manager*

I oversee projects like Grow to Scale, supported by the Mastercard Foundation and implemented in partnership with AFR and ESP. With BPN's tools and support, I drive targets and build partnerships to promote an inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem. I value BPN's focus on a growth mindset, transparency, integrity, accountability, and professionalism for staff and entrepreneurs alike.

## Professionalism



## Growth



As a business coach at BPN, my role is to ask the right questions that empower entrepreneurs to unlock their potential and achieve their goals. To support this mission, BPN provides me with training and resources that enhance my ability to guide them effectively. By helping entrepreneurs overcome challenges, refine strategies, and make informed decisions, I contribute to a more inclusive entrepreneurial environment that drives Rwanda's economic growth. Grounded in BPN's core values: ownership, integrity, growth, and professionalism, I strive to create a collaborative environment where entrepreneurs take charge of their success.



**Raoul Niyibizi**

*Business Coach*

## BPN Rwanda's company culture: My journey

My first interaction with BPN was through a company I was working for, which offered security services to BPN at the time. This was back in 2013. I started as a security guard at the BPN Business Academy (BA) facility, working the night shift. I was a part-time employee, with my colleague working the day shift. When he retired, I was approached by the then Head of Human Resources, who offered me a role at the BA facility as a part-time allrounder, helping with sanitation and the overall supervision of the facility. Back then, whenever I completed my tasks during the day, I went home. I was on a part time contract.

As time passed, the organization recognized my dedication and the time I had spent with them, and I got promoted to a full-time position as the caretaker of the entire BA facility. My role involved taking care of the ins and outs of the facility, mainly overseeing security, inventory, and sanitation. I was also responsible for safeguarding the entrepreneurs' property when they were at the facility for training, including vehicles and other valuables left outside the office. To support my work, the company provided me with a team that helped ensure everything ran smoothly. The entire BA team is so helpful and easy to work with.

On a daily basis, my work helps ensure that everything operates seamlessly. By maintaining a clean and organized environment, I create a space where entrepreneurs can study without distractions. This, in turn, allows the BPN Business Academy team members to work in an organized environment, which improves their creativity and motivates them to give their best during training sessions.

Before I started working at BPN, I was affiliated with a company that didn't fully understand the concept of time management and how crucial time is in shaping the outcomes of each day. One of the key values that BPN promotes is being on time, and incorporating this into my daily routine has helped me become more successful, both in my professional role and in my personal life. BPN is truly a beacon of light, enlightening everyone who is associated with it.

The company culture at BPN is one that promotes teamwork and growth. Every time I interact with the staff members, I never feel out of place. Instead, I always feel welcomed and encouraged to be sociable and participative. BPN promotes collaboration because whenever something needs to be done, regardless of age or status, we all come together to execute it to perfection. We then reap the rewards of our hard work together. These are some of the things I have grown to appreciate, and they are some of my fondest memories with BPN personnel.

BPN has not only been a place of work for me, but also a community where growth, respect, and collaboration are at the forefront of everything we do. I am grateful for the opportunity to be part of such a dynamic and supportive team.

**Damascene Niyonzima**

*Office Keeper and Logistics Support  
BPN Rwanda*



**BPN Rwanda Team**

# Musanze's entrepreneurial spark

## A story of growth and empowerment

In the heart of northern Rwanda, Musanze is more than just a scenic gateway to the Volcanoes National Park; it's a place brimming with opportunity. The region, known for its stunning landscapes, is also home to a growing number of entrepreneurs. When BPN Rwanda opened its branch in Musanze in 2023, it wasn't just about expanding. It was a bold step toward empowering the people of Musanze and surroundings to transforming the entrepreneurial landscape in the North and West of Rwanda.

BPN Musanze started its journey with 27 entrepreneurs ready to make a change. Since then, the branch has grown, reaching 72 entrepreneurs who are actively taking part in various programs. But beyond the numbers, it's the individual stories that highlight the real impact.

Take Aline Ishimwe, for example. At just 26, through Karisimbi Cave Resort, an eco-friendly business that goes beyond tourism, she creates jobs, empowers women to step into leadership roles, and drives sustainable growth in the community. Through her vision and determination, Aline is not only expanding her business but also making a lasting impact on the lives of those around her.



Running a business in areas like Musanze comes with its own set of challenges. Entrepreneurs often struggle with limited access to markets, scarce resources, and high service costs. BPN Rwanda understands these struggles and offers tailored solutions, including one-on-one coaching and exchange programs, to help entrepreneurs overcome these obstacles.

Musanze's unique position as a hub for tourism and agriculture makes it the perfect place for these efforts. Through programs like the Grow to Scale initiative, in partnership with MasterCard Foundation, BPN is helping businesses focused on sustainability and conservation to grow and thrive. These programs are not only transforming entrepreneurs and businesses in Musanze but also inspiring growth in surrounding areas.

BPN's mission in Musanze aligns perfectly with the district's goal to create a sustainable and inclusive economy. The theme "One Vision, Many Voices: Shaping an Inclusive Future" speaks to BPN's commitment to empowering a wide range of voices, from young entrepreneurs to seasoned business owners. This approach is creating a community where everyone plays a role in shaping the future of Rwanda.



As a result, entrepreneurs in Musanze are adopting more ethical business practices, improving employee welfare, and growing businesses that are both profitable and impactful. These changes are about more than just numbers: they reflect a shift toward a future where resilience and purpose drive success.

The opening of BPN's Musanze branch is proof of what can be achieved when vision and collaboration come together. With a dedicated team and strong community support, the branch is well on its way to nurturing even more impactful stories.

As we look forward, BPN Rwanda remains committed to helping entrepreneurs grow, enrich their communities, and contribute to a thriving economy. With the continued support of partners and stakeholders, Musanze as a secondary city is set to become a hub of innovation, tourism and sustainable business growth, paving the way for a brighter, more inclusive future for everyone.

*PS: We have an office in Musanze. Stop by when you're next up north!*



**Andrew Rucyahana**  
Head of Musanze Branch  
BPN Rwanda

# Learning, leading, and growing Elevating businesses in Rwanda and Uganda

On June 11, 2024, something remarkable happened. In three different cities - Musanze, Kigali, and Kampala, BPN entrepreneurs gathered for live training sessions, eager to gain skills that could transform their businesses. It wasn't just another day of learning; it was a moment of connection, growth, and new possibilities.

Throughout the year, business owners had been voicing their struggles. Some were finding it hard to retain customers, others were dealing with conflicts in their teams, and many were navigating the complexities of banking and financial management. Listening to these concerns, new training topics were introduced: Legal Clinic, Advanced Marketing, Conflict Resolution, Project Management, Customer Care, Lean Management, Personal Branding, Leveraging the Scale-Up Methodology, and Banking with SMEs.

One participant from the hospitality sector shared how they had always believed good customer service was just about being polite. "Now, I see it's about making customers feel truly valued. That changes everything." Similarly, business owners struggling with team dynamics found relief in the Conflict Resolution session, where they learned how to turn disagreements into opportunities for growth and trust-building.



For many entrepreneurs, financial management had always felt like a mountain too steep to climb. The Banking with SMEs session opened doors, showing them how to access loans, build relationships with banks, and use financial services to their advantage.

The impact of these trainings wasn't just seen in the numbers even though they were impressive, with participation growing from 856 in 2023 to 1,034 in 2024. It was felt in the stories shared, the friendships formed, and the sense of belonging that emerged. One entrepreneur admitted, "I thought I was alone in my struggles, but meeting others who had been through the same challenges and learning how they overcame them gave me so much hope."



In Musanze, something special happened. At the end of each seminar organized by BPN the entrepreneurs came together to cut a cake. Not one provided by the BPN team, but one they had arranged themselves. It became a symbol of their hard work, a moment to celebrate progress, and a reminder that they were in this journey together.

Looking back on the year, it's clear that these training sessions were more than just events. They were stepping stones for entrepreneurs seeking to build better businesses and stronger communities. As they move forward, the lessons learned and the connections made will continue to shape their journeys, ensuring that growth isn't just a goal: it's a shared experience.



**Joy Stella Mbabazi**  
Junior Training Officer  
BPN Rwanda

# The Enabel project: Transformative impact and key takeaways

2024 marked the end of the three-year project implemented by BPN in collaboration with NIRDA and Enabel. This program provided business development services to companies in the construction value chain in Rwanda. We reflect on its transformative effect and the significant impact it has had on entrepreneurs' growth. This milestone is a testament to the power of collaboration, resilience, and a shared vision for sustainable business development in Rwanda.

The project, driven by the partnership of three organizations: Enabel, NIRDA, and BPN changed the trajectory of 75 companies and catalyzed substantial growth across multiple dimensions:

- **2,058 jobs were created, with 58%** of these positions filled by women, showcasing a commitment to inclusivity and gender equity.
- **28 new products were launched**, highlighting innovation and market responsiveness.
- **55% of the companies adopted digital marketing**, underscoring a shift towards modern business practices.
- **15% of the companies entered the export market**, reflecting their readiness to compete regionally.
- A remarkable **85% sustainability rate**, ensuring long-term business viability.
- **100% program satisfaction** and **93% retention**, with only a **7% dropout rate**, serving as evidence of the program's effectiveness and value to participants.



A project closing event was held on June 25th, 2024 at Park Inn by Radisson Kigali, providing a platform to hear from participating entrepreneurs. Their insights revealed not only their gratitude but also their aspirations and challenges as they move forward.

1. **Gratitude:** Entrepreneurs expressed profound appreciation for the guidance received throughout the program. They highlighted significant strides in financial stability, infrastructure enhancement, and a mindset shift towards becoming more effective business leaders. The impact of this intervention is visible in their readiness to lead and grow their ventures.
2. **Poised for expansion, yet seeking continued support:** With a strong foundation laid, participants are eager to explore larger markets and scale their operations. However, they emphasized the importance of continued business development support to apply the skills and knowledge gained effectively and to navigate new challenges as their businesses evolve.
3. **Navigating government opportunities and overcoming barriers:** Access to government initiatives remains a critical hurdle. Entrepreneurs noted challenges in obtaining vital information and operational rights, such as licenses, from local government bodies. They advocated for improved collaboration between local authorities and central government entities, such as NIRDA, to streamline processes and better support entrepreneurial growth.
4. **Active involvement in government Initiatives:** Entrepreneurs underscored the need for active participation in the planning and execution of government programs. By contributing their insights and expertise, they can help shape initiatives that better align with the realities of their industries, fostering mutual success. As one entrepreneur eloquently put it, "Tout ce qui est fait pour toi, sans toi, sera contre toi." We should be involved at the conceptional level."

This quote highlights the critical need for collaboration from the very beginning of such initiatives.

As Fortunée Murekatete, one of the program participants, shared:

**"I joined this program hoping to get a grant. What I received has much, much more value. I gained a professional business and the ability to continue to grow it."**

The Enabel Project stands as an example of what is possible when vision meets action. It is a celebration of transformation, resilience, and of the entrepreneurial spirit. As we reflect on the closure of this project, we extend gratitude to the entrepreneurs, partners, and stakeholders who made this journey possible.

Together, we have not just empowered businesses: we have built a legacy of empowerment and progress.

# Conveying talents, strengthening businesses: The Bridge Talent Fair for SMEs

One of the first lessons I learned when I joined BPN was that having an entrepreneurial mindset is essential, whether or not you run your own business.

What is an Entrepreneurial Mindset? An entrepreneurial mindset is about actively listening to the problems around you and working towards creating sustainable solutions. This perspective made me realize that, although I am not an entrepreneur myself, I still have the opportunity to observe, listen, and act. I paid attention to the concerns raised by entrepreneurs and BPN coaches, particularly regarding hiring challenges. One issue stood out: while many initiatives focus on addressing unemployment, few job fairs cater specifically to the needs of SMEs.

SMEs face distinct challenges compared to large corporations. They may lack the financial resources to offer high salaries, yet working with them provides unique advantages, such as hands-on experience, rapid career growth, and a close-knit team environment. This realization sparked an idea: The Bridge Talent Fair. Consider Isimbi, an entrepreneur who spent months searching for skilled employees but struggled to find the right fit

Many SMEs in Rwanda share this challenge: traditional job fairs cater to large companies with bigger budgets, leaving smaller businesses without access to a pool of qualified candidates. Now consider Uwase, a bright and determined young woman who, despite her qualifications, faced repeated rejections. Not due to a lack of skills, but because employers often overlooked her background. She arrived at the Bridge Talent Fair with a sliver of hope, wondering if this event would be different.

Held in November 2024, the Bridge Talent Fair was designed to address these challenges. Organized by BPN Rwanda in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Service and Labour (MIFOTRA), Harambee Youth Accelerator and the Mastercard Foundation, the event aimed to connect SMEs with skilled job seekers while fostering inclusivity for those often left out of traditional job fairs.



The fair was created to help SMEs compete with larger companies for top talent. It provided entrepreneurs with direct access to pre-selected candidates, offering job seekers a real chance at dignified employment.

The event brought together 25 SMEs from the Grow2Scale program and 110 attendees, including 86 job seekers from partner organizations like Kepler, Agahozo Shalom, and Maison Shalom. Thanks to Harambee's support, transportation and logistics were covered, making the fair accessible to diverse backgrounds, including refugees and individuals with disabilities. MIFOTRA contributed post-event stipends, with entrepreneurs like Isimbi matching contributions to sustain employment for new hires.

By the end of the fair, 7 entrepreneurs hired 10 candidates, and 6 more were in the final stages of recruitment. Many businesses found the fair's structured approach saved them from the lengthy process of sifting through countless applications. Instead, they met pre-vetted candidates suited to their needs, while building long-term relationships with organizations that could supply skilled talent.

For job seekers, the event was transformative. One candidate landed a role with a logistics company that saw his potential beyond his background.

"This was my chance," he said. "For the first time, I felt like my skills mattered more than my circumstances."

Inclusivity was key, with job seekers of all abilities given equal access to interviews, reinforcing the idea that dignified employment should be available to all. While some SMEs noted the challenge of finding candidates with specialized technical skills, the event's success has set the stage for future editions in 2025. These will include rural editions in Musanze and urban editions in Kigali, with an added focus on attracting candidates with technical expertise.

Overall, the Bridge Talent Fair provided SMEs with the talent needed to scale, while offering young job seekers stability and dignity. It was more than just a job fair; it was a movement toward an employment landscape that values skill, opportunity, and inclusion.

**Lenora Biche**

Senior Marketing & Communications Officer  
BPN Rwanda

# ENABEL PROJECT CLOSING CEREMONY

PROVIDING BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SERVICES (BDS) TO COMPANIES IN THE CONSTRUCTION VALUE CHAIN



# BPN BRIDGE TALENT FAIR

PATHWAYS TO DIGNIFIED CAREERS IN THE SME SECTOR



# 1<sup>ST</sup> TOPIFY PROGRAM SEMINAR

GUEST: MR. ITZHAK FISHER, BOARD CHAIRMAN OF RDB



# WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP SUMMIT & AWARDS

## GROW TO SCALE



# PITCHING FESTIVAL/ CLOSING CEREMONY

## INVESTMENT READINESS PROGRAM



# THE WOMEN IN BUSINESS PROGRAM

6 MONTHS IN PARTNERSHIP WITH NORRSKEN HOUSE KIGALI



# BPN 2024 SEMINARS



**Stress Management**



**BP/BK Workshop**



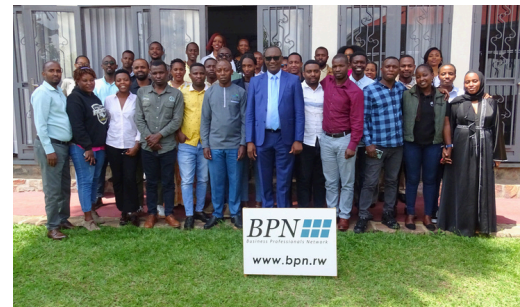
**Marketing**



**Social Media Marketing**



**Pitching Training**



**Taxation**



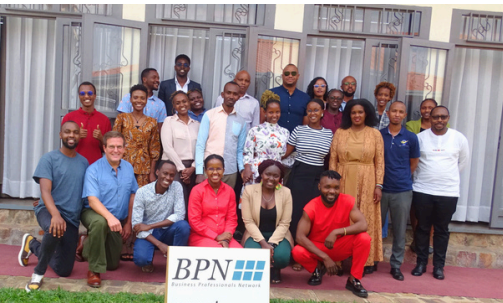
**Executive Business Administration**



**Conflict Resolution**



**Customer Care**



**Dynamic Communication**



**Legal Clinic**



**Project Management**



**Finance Management**



**Leadership**



**Marketing**



**Business Administration**



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