



**Spirit
In
Action**

Micro Grants
Major Change

Fall & Winter Newsletter 2017

Spirit in Action

Del Anderson, Founder

Tanya Cothran, Administrator

tanya@spiritinaction.org

www.spiritinaction.org

www.facebook.com/spiritinaction

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"And the day came when the risk it took to remain tight inside the bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom."
— Anais Nin

Blessing a Pig in Malawi



In May and June I spent three weeks visiting folks connected with Spirit in Action in Kenya and Malawi. With my team - Mike Hegeman, Dana Belmonte, and Boyd Cothran - we met with seven community organizations and over 100 Small Business Fund entrepreneurs. Each day was a new adventure!

Visiting the site of the Manyamula COMSIP Cooperative maize-grinding mill, the group told us that they had a surprise for us. That day they had a piglet to give to an orphan boy in the community! This is one of 55 piglets that the group has shared with vulnerable members through their "Pig Pass-On" project. A portion of the profit from the mills are used to buy and care for piglets, which are passed on to those in need. This is their collective act of Sharing the Gift.

On that late afternoon in Manyamula Village, where the sun sets around 6pm all year around, we paraded with over fifty cooperative members across the fields. The women sang songs of Spirit in Action and their own successes. They sang their gratitude to SIA and made joyful ululations.

When we arrived at the pig pen the local leader picked up the piglet and called over an orphan boy that the group wanted to nurture and encourage. I laid my hand on the pig's back and said a blessing. I acknowledged the great opportunity for this boy to make a positive change in his life. I also thanked God for the power of community and the generosity of the group. After I finished, the rest of the SIA team each gave a little speech, sharing stories of hope and encouragement.

I was grateful to be there in person for this beautiful moment of sharing and celebration!



Has it really been 10 years??

Has it really been ten years?? When I embarked on this journey as Spirit in Action Executive Administrator in September 2007, I had no idea that I would still be here ten years later!

In those ten years, Spirit in Action has given:

- **\$79,650 for 531 Small Business Fund businesses**
- **\$50,439 to 27 different grassroots organizations**

Behind each of those numbers are families and groups of people. They represent individuals with whom I have emailed, texted, visited, and collaborated.

In these ten years, I treasure memories of:

- Seeing the realization of a dream in Malawi (breaking ground on the new training centre, and three years later cutting the ribbon and sleeping in the new dorm rooms) **Pictured above.**



- Receiving letters from Del, filled with affirmations and encouragement
- Singing and dancing with our partners in Kenya and Malawi

- Eating pancakes and drinking chai at Samro School in Kenya, surrounded by dear friends

- Arriving in Manyamula Village and being welcomed by the local team who shook my hand and gave me hugs, saying over and over, “**feel welcome!**”

There have been prayers shared, inspiration sent and received, amazing donors, and passionate board members and volunteers. Through it all, I am continually blessed to be able to dedicate myself to work that I see is making a positive difference in the world.

Thank you to all of you who have been part of this journey with me! And, don't worry, I'm not going anywhere anytime soon.

See your support in action! Read our blog posts for success stories, photos, and inspiration! <http://spiritinaction.org>

The Path of Transformation

Del Anderson, March 2006, Age 100

- Begin right where you are with what you have.
- Give thanks to God for the gift of your own special life.
- Thank God for family, friends, community and for all that has brought you to this present, holy moment.
- Each day, spend time with God in the silence, sensing God's Spirit of love within YOU.
- Let go of all that binds and limits you, and sense God's empowering Spirit coming forth within you more and more fully, day by day.
- Open to gratitude, expectation and wonder.
- Recognize that you are a Spiritual being with God's indwelling Spirit activating you.
- In the quiet, sense the true needs of yourself, your family, your community.
- Lay these true needs before God, opening to God's guidance and empowerment, letting God come forth in every aspect of your life.



“Mother Mary Wasn’t Cut!”: A New Narrative of Womanhood

The narrative of the traditional people in Meru, Kenya is that you cannot be a woman if you have not had the ritual female genital cutting.

“We tell a different story,” says Grace, a nurse who teaches at the CIFORD Kenya Girls’ Empowerment Seminars. I met with Grace in June and she told me about her approach to empowerment. “You are a woman because you were created by God. There is nothing bad inside you that needs to be let out through the cut. Mother Mary wasn’t cut!”

This anti-female genital mutilation (FGM) message of hope is so important to the girls who are working with CIFORD to forge new rites of passage in rural Kenya.

Countering more traditional narratives, Grace and her team of female leaders talk to the girls about the importance of education and delaying marriage and childbirth.

“The traditional leaders don’t tell the girls about the difficulties they will have in childbirth if they are cut,” said Grace, with a mixture of frustration and disbelief.



Dispelling misinformation is only part of it. Empowering the girls to stand up for their rights and for the future they want for themselves is another aspect of the CIFORD seminars. Grace reports, “After our



Above: Girls march through the streets of Meru District, following one of the alternative rites of passage celebrations. Their shirts say, “Girls need education, not circumcision.” **Below:** Nurse Grace talks to girls about the dangers of circumcision.

seminars, girls stand by themselves and say no.”

The seminars culminate with a grand celebration and an alternative rite of passage. The parents, families, teachers, local leaders, and government officials are invited to attend. There is singing, dancing, poems, and testimonies from the young women. It is both an act of defiance and solidarity.

FGM is illegal in Kenya. The cutting is often done in unsanitary ways and in the middle of the night to avoid detection. It is in the interest of the chiefs and government officials to stop the illegal activities, and to protect the health

of their constituents. Margaret Ikiara, CIFORD Director, noted that “the alternative rites of passage celebrations are an opportunity for the District Official to say publicly that they support the girls. One gave his phone number and told the girls to call him if anyone was harassing them about cutting.”

“After our seminars, girls stand by themselves and say ‘no.’” - Nurse Grace

The celebration is not the end of the work, though. Girls who have already gone through the program want to give back. They go back to their homes, villages, and schools and talk to other girls to encourage them to make their own decisions regarding their futures and their bodies. This creates a ripple effect and begins to cement a new narrative of womanhood.

Spirit in Action has supported three anti-FGM seminars since 2011, including one last year for both boys and girls.

Love is Warm Coca-Cola

by Mike Hegeman, SIA Advisory Board Member

I recently returned from spending three weeks in Malawi and Kenya with Tanya, visiting Spirit in Action partners. In each place, I encountered common people of faith living in uncommon ways.

One such person was Sister Magrina. It took us several hours to reach her, down a winding highway from the lush, fertile highlands of northwest Kenya, into the arid and seemingly desolate lowlands of the Rift Valley. It was an hour's journey down a shockingly bumpy road, then a twenty minute hike into the brush, all to find a woman dressed humbly in a blue habit and shod with a worn pair of laceless sneakers, sitting under a tree in the



limited, but much desirable shade. In one hand she held an outdated cellphone and in the other a bunch of rocks which she would throw one by one to keep the birds out of her withering crops.

Sister Magrina is a nun with degrees in counselling and addiction therapy, who had given up the “comforts” of her highlands home to come live among the

poor of this most forgettable village on the edge of nowhere. Just a smattering of mud huts and farms, with no running water and no latrines; only a paltry stream to water the vast desert valley.



Above: Visiting Sister Magrina and learning about her community activism with women. She served us cookies and soda pop. Mike Hegeman is pictured on the far left.
Below: Sister Magrina in her bean fields. She received a Small Business Fund grant in 2015.

Sister Magrina had come here to plant a farm, not for herself, but to have a reason to be closer to some of Kenya's most vulnerable people. Here in this village spousal violence is rampant, alcoholism legion and malnutrition ubiquitous.

Sister Magrina sits by her crops, and when women of the village or children wander by, she invites them to sit and pass the time of day. She listens to their woes, how evil has befallen them and scourge has come near their tents. She

quietly teaches them about ways they can support themselves when their husbands are off drinking and neglecting support for them and their children. She teaches them how to grow kitchen gardens and about helpful hygiene techniques. She encourages the children to stay in school.

“I am not a Catholic; I am not a Protestant. I am one who comes in Christ's love to make a difference.” ~ Sister Magrina, Kenya

She is the presence of God's love in that place; the God who promises to be with us, is present in that place through a sister willing to live in a mud hut, drink from a simple stream, and teach people to create a sustainable way of living for themselves. **(Continued on next page...)**

Love is Warm Coca-Cola (continued...)

More than anything else, Sister Magrina teaches them about love, and thereby teaches them about faith in God. Sister Magrina says, "In this place, I am not a Catholic; I am not a Protestant. I am one who comes in Christ's love to make a difference; I have come to a place where no one else will come...to be among God's people...even if they don't know yet that's who they are." She lives a pretty uncommon life. Her work bears witness to God's salvation, God's delivering grace.

When first we came upon Sister Magrina, we were strangers. Yet, she set out burlap sacks for us to sit upon the dusty ground. Warm Coca-Cola appeared, along with some fruit and crackers. We fellowshiped in the dappled shade, still sweating, and we listened to an uncommon woman, express her uncommon faith, embodying hospitality to strangers...with children in her lap and at her feet.

A song of praise from Malawi

by Matthews Mahowe, Small Business Fund Member, Group #1 Manyamula Malawi

I have a song of praise and thanks for SIA.

Yes, I have come out of the depths of poverty because of the Small Business Fund.

Life of food insecurity, begging, even poor clothing, I am out of it.

I have a song of praise of SIA and the whole board.

When I sleep and have some inside thinking, I think about SIA.

Why would I fail to sing a hearty song for SIA?

When I see the motorbike, when I see maize mills, when I see people eating well, I think of SIA.

When I remember the time when Boyd and Tanya were doing the ground-breaking, these remind me that I sing the song of praise.

We have been given funds for five years for operations, what stops me to sing the song of praise?

If I fail to sing a song of praise, it is birds from the bush who will sing that song, looking at the infrastructure and bricks.

Leave me alone to sing a song of praise.

When I see that home, the office block and the guest rooms, then I have tears of joy and gladness falling through me.

If dead people were to come alive, they would have said, "God bless Spirit in Action."

If you look at the chairs, if you look at the cooking pots, and women dressing well, that is part of SIA's support.

SIA affects changes again through Sharing the Gift.

We have a story of a project, Pig-Pass-On, whose major source is the maize mill from Spirit in Action.

We have also this concept of Sharing the Gift, which is a concept born of Spirit in Action, through the Small Business Fund.

Yes, even the district commissioner came to say that, "I have never seen a huge project like this one done by local people."

So, we thank you, Spirit in Action.

~ Performed by Matthews Mahowe in Tumbuka, Interpreted into English by Canaan Gondwe



Our Mission: SPIRIT IN ACTION is a network of committed people world-wide who are serving God by empowering others. SIA is a 501(c)(3), tax-exempt, charitable foundation. We appreciate your prayers, comments, questions, and tax-deductible contributions. **80¢ of every dollar donated to SIA supports programs in Africa!** Tax ID# 93-1207351



“It is now an established fact that the Small Business Fund has come to liberate vulnerable households into a better livelihood.”
 ~ Canaan Gondwe, SIA Local Coordinator, Malawi

Top Left: Violet Tina and Tanya with Violet’s designer dresses. Violet lives in the Nairobi slum of Korogocho. She used the profit from her hair salon business to buy a sewing machine. “In the future, I will be able to buy more fabrics to be a designer.”

Above Right: SIA Team and Small Business Fund Coordinators visiting business groups in Malawi. Coordinators from three countries came to Malawi for training and program evaluation.

Middle Left: Myinga Narinda is a carpenter in Malawi, “I make cabinets, sofas and beds. I supply myself with food and good clothing for church. Three meals a day for me, four kids and a wife.”

Middle Center: Tanya with Meekness Mumba and Winifi Hunga. Meekness recently shared the gift of a piglet with Winifi. Meekness received a piglet from another Small Business Fund member in the community. Winifi is the fourth Sharing the Gift ripple!

Middle Right: Members of the Matungu Community Development Charity in Kenya. They received a SIA grant to start a local savings and loans organization. The day we visited they were collecting savings deposits from members.

Bottom Left: Women and men from the Ciford Kenya Group sharing their stories of community food security, environmental conservation, and women's empowerment.



Thank you to our generous supporters!

We gratefully acknowledge those who have contributed to SIA from April 4 to September 22, 2017.

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Thank you, Dennis Johnson!

Thank you for sharing your musical talent with Spirit in Action by hosting three recitals!

Yes! I want to support families in Africa with a gift to Spirit in Action.

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Gertrude's Step Towards a Sustainable Life

Since 2007, Gertrude Mazunda has been a single mother of four. Gertrude's husband went to work in South Africa, leaving 26-year-old Gertrude with their three boys and one girl.

They never had enough food and lived in only the most basic shelter. The burden of providing for the family weighed heavily on Gertrude.

Canaan Gondwe, SIA Small Business Fund coordinator in Manyamula, Malawi, saw Gertrude's potential. He began counseling her in 2016 to prepare her to receive SIA's \$150 grant.

With this entrepreneurial mindset and the capital income to buy fertilizer, the family started growing corn as a cash crop. They



Gertrude with her eldest son, Uchizi (age 18), and the iron sheets they have bought with farm profits.

secured a contract to sell to the local high school, earning \$50 per month.

The first thing the family wanted to do after this success was to improve their home. In January this year, they bought 20 of the 30 iron sheets they will need to replace their leaky roof with a shiny tin roof.

“We have embarked on a step towards sustainable life –we had no food before, and now we have some,”

says Gertrude proudly. “Our house as you can see, is dilapidated. But look at the iron sheets and brick! We are working toward a better home.”

Each SIA grant is an opportunity for a family to take the first step out of poverty.



FALL & WINTER 2017 NEWSLETTER

Tanya Cothran, Executive Administrator
PO Box 3384
Santa Cruz, CA 95063

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