Collective Farming in Uganda

One Small Business Fund grant of $150 can lease just under one acre of red, rich earth in central Uganda. But, if the cohort of five new Small Business Fund groups in Tekwaro Village all pooled their grants, they can lease a good-sized plot of 4.5 acres!

Okori Simon, one of the farmers, told me about the process, “We together planned and visited the land as a team and meet the clan leaders and elders who agreed to lease us the land for cultivation. Working the same piece of land avoids fragmented cultivation by each other, and promotes teamwork and collective production, and hopefully collective market search and sale.” In other words, it’s easier when they do it together.

The five Ugandan families decided to cultivate soybeans, and began by ploughing the land twice. Spirit in Action Small Business Fund local coordinator, Naomi Ayot, helped them purchase 90 pounds of quality seeds from a company in Kampala, 200 miles and many hours away. She also arranged for a seed representative to provide some training to the group members.

Just last month, the improved seeds were planted and the group members are expecting to harvest around 4,000 lbs of soybeans this July! Ultimately, the group is hoping to be able to purchase their own land, so that they do not need to pay rents each year. They also are working on linking up with a larger market to receive better prices for their crops. All of this, they are doing together!

Pictured Above: Group members plant the soybeans in the newly ploughed fields. Pictured Left: Sarah Okull, one of the group members.
New book featuring Spirit in Action!

We are so excited to announce the publication of SMART RISKS: How Small Grants Are Helping to Solve Some of the World’s Biggest Problems by Practical Action Publishing, in June!

This book, which I have been co-editing with Jennifer Lentfer, of Thousand Currents, contains essays by 22 authors from 20 organizations. The book explores how grantmaking that is focused on grassroots wisdom and close connections can make a lasting impact in the Global South.

I contributed three essays about Spirit in Action’s work. Our holistic focus and flexible funding model sets us apart from large nonprofits that cannot make the time to connect on a personal level with their grant partners. I, and the other authors of this book, believe that investing in effective grassroots groups is a “smart risk.”

For more information, including how to order the book, visit: www.smartrisks.org

Welcoming New Board Members
Wendy & Terry Silverthorn!

The SIA Board is pleased to welcome long-time supporters, Wendy and Terry Silverthorn, to join their ranks. They are both dedicated to service, and to building their prayer lives.

Wendy worked as a Marriage and Family Therapist for the past 20 years. Her work included early intervention with traumatized, abused, and attachment disordered children; couples therapy; and individual therapy with all ages. After retiring from his career as a pilot, Terry had more time to be involved in the community. He first drove a school bus and then a bus to help the people of the homeless community get to the shelters available during the cold winter months.

I asked Wendy what she likes about SIA and what excites her about joining the Board:

“I love that SIA empowers people to help themselves. Through educational, emotional, and financial support, SIA provides opportunities for individuals and communities to learn new skills and develop small sustainable businesses that allow them to support themselves and their families. I love that these small businesses are encouraged to share, passing similar opportunities on to others in their community. The ripple effect has such potential to change lives.

“We have followed and supported the work of SIA since its beginning. It is such an honor to join the SIA Board and have the opportunity to work more closely with this caring organization. After attending my first Board Meeting, I feel so excited to realize the unlimited potential of SIA’s work to change and save lives . . . one step at a time, one grant at a time, one act of love at a time!

See your support in action! Read our weekly blog posts for success stories, photos, inspiration from Del, and more! http://spiritinaction.org
Letting go and letting God be “God in us, through us, and as us,” is a process, not a destination.

Spirit affirms, I am an expression of God.

The answer to all my needs is to realize my complete dependency upon God and my complete wholeness in God.

This requires letting go of the bodily consciousness of a child, learning to walk, talk and function as an adult human. In doing so I needed to learn that I had the power of choice and control of my bodily expression.

Therefore, I am now learning that life is a process, not a destination, and that God's process is letting go and letting the Spirit express itself through me.

This is a daily process of a period of silence and stillness in which I listen in prayer. It is a disciplined practice and a daily focus - a desire to understand God's will for my life.

For more inspiration from Del, SIA Founder, visit: spiritinaction.org/del

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**Entrepreneurs in Nairobi: “We feel resurrected”**

The men and women who receive SIA Small Business Fund grants in the informal settlements around Nairobi are living in rough conditions. They and their families are living without running water or adequate toilet facilities. Also, structures are made of tin pieces and are packed together very closely.

Yet, with the chance to start her own business and to provide for her family, one of the new Small Business Fund entrepreneurs said that she feels ‘resurrected’ and ‘like other people’ now.

Here are some of the success stories from other SIA grant recipients in Nairobi:

- **Kezziah, selling vegetables**: Her profit was more than predicted! She is able to pay school fees for all her children. She is especially proud that she can pay for her daughter to attend high school.

- **Nelly, making soaps**: She was making five liters of soap at a time, and repacking it in smaller quantities to sell. Now, she makes 60 liters and has a much better market. Three people have benefitted from this business and she is able to take her son to a better school. She can also afford medical care.

- **Phoebe, selling fabric**: She is so proud to be able to send her son to a boarding school out of Nairobi County! Five people benefitted from the business, but the best thing that ever happened to her is sending her son to boarding school just like ‘other people’!

So far, SIA has supported 33 businesses in the Korogocho slum in Nairobi.

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**Wisdom from Del: Letting go and letting God**

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For more inspiration from Del, SIA Founder, visit: spiritinaction.org/del
New & Ongoing Grants

New grants are awarded every six months at SIA Board Meetings (*= new grants)

*Caretakers Orphans Education Centre, Kenya (Training & Economic Development) Skills training workshops and supplies for 50 women to learn bead-working and carpet-making.

Manyamula Community Savings and Investment Promotion (COMSIP) Cooperative, Malawi (Training Centre for the cooperative) Funding for construction of a building to be used as an office, meeting hall, guest house, and restaurant. (See pg. 7)

*Matungu Community Development Charity, Kenya (Economic Development) Formation of a table-banking cooperative with low-interest loans for small-scale farmers.

Megabridge Foundation, Kenya (Piggery & Economic Development) Funding to build a pig house and buy 10 sows and 2 boar pigs for breeding. Piglets will be shared with 70 women.

*Namaiyana Women Group, Kenya (Economic Development) Construction of a roadside shop for the artisans to be able to sell their jewelry to tourists.

Samro Grade School, Kenya (Education) Tuition and board for three students and tuition for four additional students. Desks for classrooms and sanitary pads for students.

*Universal Love Ministries, Uganda (Human Rights) Seven workshops for high school students about LGBT awareness, tolerance and rights. Formation of “inclusivity clubs” to continue the work after the workshops.

*SIA Small Business Fund Funding for 20 new businesses in Kenya, Malawi, and Uganda in April, 2017.

Read success stories and see photos: www.spiritinaction.org/news

Thank you to Dennis Johnson for three wonderful piano concerts benefitting Spirit in Action.

Thank you to Joshua Brooks for running a half-marathon to raise funds for five new Small Business Fund grants!

Top Left: Samburu artisans in front of their nearly-complete curio shop near Samburu National Park in Kenya. They will be able to sell to the many tourists who come for safari there.

Above Right: SIA Small Business Fund Business leader Samsa used her grant to plant maize and sunflowers on her farm in Uganda. She is able to pay for school fees for four of her children with money from the crops!

Bottom Left: One of the pigs raised by the Megabridge Foundation piggery project!
“Keeping Girls Safe in School”
A new way to help Malawian girls stay in school

Mary G. (pictured below) is 16 years old and is in 8th grade at Chiskembe Primary School in northern Malawi. Both of Mary’s parents died when she was nine years old and she now lives with her grandma. She works with her grandma to sell charcoal and maize (corn) bran to earn money for their basic needs.

During the rainy season, they are not able to carry out their charcoal burning activities, and so the business struggles.

Traditionally, it is a taboo in Malawi for parents to discuss menstrual hygiene with their daughters. This meant that Mary grew up without any information about how to deal with her period when it came.

“The only advice I got from my grandmother about how to take care of myself during menstruation was that I should always stay away from boys during that time. This made me to miss classes during my menstruation time.”

Mary did not have regular access to cotton pads or other cloth to use during her period, and skipping class during this week of the month led to her having to repeat classes several times.

This is all changing through a program with the Malawian grassroots organization, Hope for Relief. Through their “Keeping Girls Safe in School” project, Mary received four reusable pads and guidance about how to use and wash them from women in the community.

Mary is just one of 630 girls who have received free pads, with a total of 1890 pads distributed overall! Hope for Malawi has also hosted a series of awareness meetings, talking to community members (parents) about a girl’s right to education, and the proper channels to address cases of early marriages and sexual assault.

Mary has promised to never miss class due to menstruation and to work hard to complete her primary school education this year! Already, she has not missed a single class in the past two months.

"Be humble for you are made of earth. Be noble for you are made of stars."
- Serbian Proverb

One of the tailors distributes cloth feminine pads to girls. They have sewed and distributed 1890 pads!
Thank you to our generous supporters!

We gratefully acknowledge those who have contributed to SIA from October 10, 2016 to April 3, 2017.

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  - Jan Burnett
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Honoring Jim Thomas
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Bill & Tari French
Barbara Thomas

Manyamula COMSIP Named Best Cooperative

Congratulations to our long-time partner, Manyamula COMSIP Cooperative in Malawi! There are over 4,000 other COMSIP savings and loans cooperatives in Malawi, and the Manyamula chapter was recognized as the best performing cooperative in 2016! The cooperative currently has 180 members and lends over $3,000 to their members each year. They also have 98.5% repayment!

Their motto is, “Together we grow.” Together they encourage economic development in their own community. Cooperative leader, Canaan Gondwe, shares, “Yes, we have gone this far because of SIA’s unrelenting moral and financial support.”

The story of the formation of this cooperative is told in my essay in the book, “Smart Risks: How small grants are helping to solve some of the world’s biggest problems.” (See pg. 2 for more info!)

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

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

Name(s) _________________________________
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I would like to receive weekly blog posts. ___
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I would like to join the DREAMER’S CIRCLE by pledging a monthly/quarterly gift of $_______

Please mail your contribution to:
Spirit in Action
PO Box 3384
Santa Cruz CA 95063

Donate online!
www.spiritinaction.org/support
It’s almost time! I’m getting ready for song and dance, bumpy roads, starry night skies, meals of maize and chicken, and lots of chai tea. In just a few weeks, on May 23rd, I will land in Malawi, for a three-week trip to visit SIA partners.

The days will be filled with visiting Small Business Fund groups, meeting grassroots leaders, and evaluating our programs. I welcome your prayers for a smooth and inspiring trip for all!

Follow along on our Facebook and Instagram pages as I share photos and stories of the people we meet!

Part 1: Malawi:
- Manyamula Savings and Loans Group Cooperative
- Small Business Fund groups
- Youth entrepreneurs in Blantyre
- Conference and training for SIA Small Business Fund Coordinators

Part 2: Kenya
- Teimuge’s Samro School
- Small Business Fund groups in Nairobi and Eldoret
- CIFORD Kenya
- Megabridge Foundation

Visas secured and bags packed!

Tanya with Small Business Fund Coordinator and Trainer, Dennis Kiprop, his wife, Nancy, and son, Timo, in Eldoret, Kenya.