

Today, I would like to **show you what transformation looks like** through the lens of farming in rural Uganda, and the story of Teddy Rose (with the bright shirt in the center), a woman **who has improved her own life and the lives of many others through farming** with an organization called **COFIA**, which stands for Circle of Friends in Action.

70% of the population of Uganda farm for sustenance and try to earn some income. It may not look like it in this picture of happy people, but farming is hard.



They **plow the land by hand** or pay for an ox-bound plow which is slow; often missing the ideal time for planting. Their yields are poor, using antiquated farming methods and depleted seeds. They farm peanuts, and get the seeds from each shell by hand, which is painful. At harvest, the process of taking the pods off the roots is tedious. Every step of the way there is **risk of losses and diminished quality** due to poor handling. They barely get by, and with climate change often they do not, enduring what they call “hunger season”.

These challenges, and others they face, lead to a generational “poverty mindset”, where **nothing seems possible**.

On top of this, **half of the population of Uganda** is under the age of 16, and young people understandably have no interest in farming, yet 70% of the population depends on it.

1.5 mins

Let me tell you about how we are addressing these conditions with our project

For the **last 8 years**, COFIA and Tacoma Sunrise Rotary have worked together to develop a **network of farmers and a 15-acre demonstration farm** which acts as a center for training and inspiration. We have hosted four annual 3-day **agricultural expositions** on the demo farm, reaching over 3,000 rural farmers so far. Uganda's National Agricultural Research Organization (called **NARO**) has been an integral partner in this work. NARO advises on every aspect of our development and provides training on everything from cassava to poultry and rice to mangos, giving farmers **knowledge and hope**.

Teddy Rose heard about the exposition and was **determined to attend**. As the leader of her farming association, she walked three hours each way, each day, so that she could **connect her community** with COFIA. On the last day of the Expo last year, she put her business card in my hand and asked if we could **bring her farming association into** the COFIA family. Her courageous request itself was transformational for us.

Our approach is highly relational. We work with Collectives—mostly women—who farm in groups of three on 2-acre parcels. We support Champion farmers who farm their own parcels of 2 acres or more. **We provide training, land, seeds, fertilizer and market access** to COFIA farmers.

This year, because of Teddy Rose, we **invited her farming association and two other tight-knit associations into the Circle** and greatly expanded our reach, **tripling** the number of farmers to 220 people in the COFIA Farming Network. Now, **COFIA plans to scale to 2,000** farmers over the next 4 years.

At that scale, **mechanization of farming is key**. We introduced it as a trial with our first global grant and our farmers have been asking for it since, to make farming easier and more productive. **We listened**.

This global grant will provide more walking tractors to prepare the land, shellers to get the peanut seeds from the shell, threshers to aid in harvest, drying houses to prepare the crops for storage, and peanut butter machines to create value addition opportunities for the farmers in the enterprise. These machines will **make farming accessible to more farmers**, especially women and youth.

The **budget for equipment to scale** the COFIA Farming Network is \$369,000.

There are **9 Rotary clubs and 4 Rotary districts** participating in this grant so far. With Rotary District and RI match we currently have **\$101,000 pledged**.

4.5 mins total

Rotary's greatest strength lies in the relationships we build, and we have a phenomenal partnership with our Host Club

COFIA and Tacoma Sunrise Rotary have been collaborating with the Rotary Club of Kiwatule for the **last three years**, crafting and implementing a \$100,000 global grant to **support the early growth** of the COFIA farming enterprise with training and equipment. We were **brought together by Carolyn Othieno**, the founder of COFIA and **Xavier Sentema**, Past District Governor and a member of Kiwatule Rotary.

Well-established in Kampala, Kiwatule Rotary has **past and present leaders** at the District and Zone levels. Many members have **family ties to the Tororo** area where COFIA projects take place. They have **deep experience** with Global Grants, and have sent large and enthusiastic **delegations** to the **expositions** and to our **handover ceremony** for the equipment in our current grant.

Their **processes and record keeping** are exemplary. We have delivered 2/3 of the budget in the first year of implementation, with 2 years of training left in the grant. **9 Rotary clubs from 3 Districts** contributed to that grant.

5.5 mins total

Who benefits from all this collaboration?

The typical household in rural Uganda is 5-6 family members. So, with 2,000 farmers at the completion of this grant, the **total direct beneficiaries are approximately 10,000 people**. But the reach extends to neighbors and community members who benefit from the new wealth coming into their communities too. The reach of the indirect benefits could be 3-4 times that amount before long. At scale, we will have farmers across the Tororo District, which has a population of over 600,000 individuals.

Remember how I said that half of the population is under the age of 16?

We have an **innovative opportunity for their future.**

We are **training Youth Technicians** who will be paid to operate and maintain the equipment on behalf of the farming community, creating a new dimension of the farming enterprise. Young people get broader exposure to farming, **bringing in a new generation of farmers with greater capability.** We want farming to be not only necessary, but **desirable as a vocation**, earning above the average income.

This week the national experts conducted training of 50 youth on the farming equipment from our current global grant. They were so enthusiastic, the youth and the trainers. This grant will bring in hundreds more youth over the coming seasons.

7 mins total

Where is the farmers voice in crafting this grant?

This summer, we **surveyed 71 of the COFIA farmers and held a one-day workshop with them**, along with District Agricultural Officers and the NARO agricultural experts, all focused on mechanization.

Here's what farmers told us in the survey:

- 90% showed strong interest in mechanization
- 84% lacked access to equipment
- 63% had limited technical knowledge
- 37% cited high costs as a key barrier

In the workshop **farmers spoke** not only about their **trials**, but also their **strengths and vision** for farming with mechanization. Said one farmer “The challenge is not lack of resources; it is connecting these existing strengths to new mechanization opportunities”.

We collaborated with researchers and district officers to understand the most appropriate and effective equipment to purchase and the training programs to include in the grant.

8 min total

What makes this grant sustainable?

The COFIA **community will own** the equipment collectively. With COFIA's guidance, the farmers will contribute a small amount from their harvest proceeds each season to **maintain a fund to operate and service** the equipment. **Youth are a central part** of that operational continuity and longevity.

So, this grant is not only **sustainable, but also generative.**

8.5 min total

There are as many reasons to support this grant as there are farmers, but I'd like to highlight 3:

- 1) This grant makes farming **less difficult, more attractive, and profitable** for more people. More families can afford to **send their children to school**. That's the first thing they do with the new income.
- 2) It brings the **youth of the rural communities into farming** with new innovations, giving them hope for a meaningful livelihood right where they live.
- 3) We are **working hand in hand** with local, regional and national experts as well as enthusiastic, supportive and invested Rotary clubs. Our efforts, and the efforts of the farmers, are bringing results.

So, let's come back to Teddy Rose. Rotary and COFIA **made it possible for her to imagine** a better future for herself and her community, which **led to her determination and commitment**. And she changed our outlook too. **She inspired us to dream bigger**. The folks you see are just a few of the farmers she brought into the Circle of Friends in Action. They're holding their seeds for the second season of farming with us.

I hope you **get a sense of how the Circle is growing and transforming lives** through farming mechanization.

Please join us in the Circle.

This is Rotary at its best!

10 min total

Extra time:

Mechanization is **one of three global grants** we have in development with Kiwatule Rotary and COFIA, centering on the COFIA farmers. **The other two address** water infrastructure and replicating the COFIA model in another region of Uganda. We have **another project** that is bringing health services to our farmers and their families. All of these came about because **one Rotarian talked to another**, formed a relationship and chose to collaborate. In all cases, we are **reciprocating our contributions** with each other, drawing in more matching funds.

Now, we have **15 clubs in 5 districts** working together, benefitting people around the world through Global Grants. Again, Rotary at its best!

(30 seconds)

What is the biggest risk?

Climate change and the predictability of the weather. But this is where the equipment is a game changer for the farmer. Every step of farming is less of a challenge, making the farmers even more resilient than they are.