

PO Box 3384 Santa Cruz CA 95063
www.spiritinaction.org tanya@spiritinaction.org

The Women of Change are a group of women from the different areas in Rift valley region of Kenya. A majority of them come from Elgeyo-Marakwet, West pokot and Nandi counties. This is a group of about 1500 transformed women who have taken a new path in life and are now growing and nurturing different constructive businesses.

Before they became women of change, they were alcohol brewers. The types of alcohol they made are currently illegal in Kenya, which meant the women had several run-ins with law enforcement. Some of them were wanted criminals in their villages and towns and they had to be constantly hiding and on the look-out. Chiefs and police officers would conduct random impromptu raids and arrest them for illegal possession and consumption of alcohol. Chang’aa and busaa, which are the most common traditional alcoholic beverages, were banned because of their high and non-standardized volume of alcohol, unhygienic ways of preparation and lethality. Several people have died of poisoning because of consumption of this type of alcohol. Also, since they prepared on open fire under high pressure without any form of protection, the equipment can burst or leak causing explosions which are exceedingly hazardous.

From their stories and testimonies, it is clear that they lived a life of restlessness and fright. They did not have any peace or order in their lives. Their children did not go to school and if they did, did not have time to study or food to eat. The women would constantly be making, drinking or selling the alcohol to customers. Their marriages and families were estranged but they felt they had to do this in order to provide for and sustain their families.

Ever since they decided to change their lives for the better and received training at Ukweli training center, their lives have completely transformed. They were trained on gardening, poultry keeping, livestock rearing and baking pastry which they picked up with much enthusiasm and are now fully practicing in their farms. They received spiritual guidance and leadership skills as well to which some have become pastors and village elders in their communities. Their families have witnessed this incredible journey and are still in awe.

Through Spirit In Action, the women have found partners who are able to hold their hand and guide them in this newly found course. To give them hope and assertion of a better tomorrow.

In June, SIA Board Member Barbara Deal and I visited several of the Women of Change who have also received Small Business Fund grants. These $150 grants help them as they are starting new, legal enterprises. Ruth used to be a notorious brewer in her neighborhood. Now she is “notorious for Jesus,” she says with a laugh. She is also notorious for her breads and baked goods. She used her SIA grant to buy a charcoal oven for baking. She has hired three employees (job creator!) to help her with cooking her delicious scones and delivering them to schools and shops that sell them. As she told us about her business and showed me her record books, I could tell that she was a good business woman after all those years running the illegal brewery.

“I thank God that now we are using lotion!” she told us. When you are poor, you use the same oil for cooking and lotion. Being able to buy body lotion is a simple luxury that Ruth now enjoys. Her kids also now all go to school and they sleep through the night, rather than be interrupted by drunks and police raids.

We also visited Grace who was a popular illegal brewer in her area of Iten, Kenya. She had a lot of land but wasn’t using it productively, since all her efforts were focused on brewing. Now, she told us that she is food secure, meaning she has enough food to last her throughout the year. She grows corn, the staple food in Kenya and raises sheep, goats, rabbits, and fish. She used her SIA Small Business Fund grant to open a small grocery kiosk (like a corner store in this rural area) which brings in $25 per day. She estimated that she has about 30 customers each day, most of them former brewer customers. Grace mentors women in her neighborhood and counsels them on personal matters and in business.

Thank you for your support which is helping these women turn their lives towards something positive for their communities and for their families!