

When the Land Speaks Back:

The Story of Two Farmers and a Movement Reclaiming Seeds, Soil, and Strength



In the rural landscapes of Soroti, Uganda, where the soil is rich, but the odds are often stacked against smallholder farmers, two quiet revolutions have been taking root, led by people who once believed they had no future in farming.

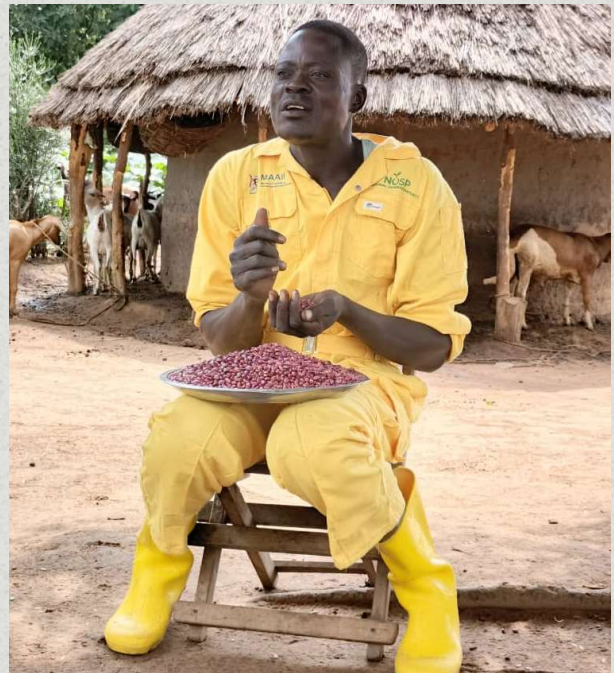
Alfred Okello was one of them. He left school after Primary Two. In a community where education is often the only visible path to a better life, dropping out so early could have meant a lifetime of hardship. But Alfred's story didn't end there

Everything changed when Alfred joined a Farmer Field School in Ogwolo, through a local initiative known as *ChaChaWaWa*, short for "Climate Change is With Us All." Under this project, supported by the Right to Food and **Sowing Diversity = Harvesting Security, SD=HS*, Alfred found a new kind of learning. This time, the classroom was the land itself.

He began cultivating Araka beans and Ecadoi, a traditional leafy green known as African Spider Plant. Once seen as low-value crops, they became his gateway to stability. Through guidance from the Agroecological Centers of Excellence, Alfred transformed them into sources of income and resilience.

Today, Alfred is not just growing food, he's multiplying seeds, raising goats, producing organic pesticides, and regenerating his land using farmer-managed natural regeneration. His work has drawn interest from institutions

like *NARO and *NaSARRI, and now, he is calling for the registration of local seed varieties, certification of organic inputs, and support for farmer-led seed enterprises.



Not far from Alfred's fields, another transformation was quietly unfolding.

Betty Asio, a facilitator at Egangainos Farmer Field School in Asuret, had long depended on chemical fertilizers to grow her tomatoes. Like many others, she was told that high-value crops couldn't survive without them. But through *ChaChaWaWa* and its partner CIDI, Betty began to question that belief, and then to challenge it.

She learned how to make her own liquid manure, organic pesticides, and natural fungicides, all from local materials. Her tomatoes began to flourish. The soil became richer. The insects disappeared, not from poison, but from balance. Betty's farm was transformed into a model for others, showcasing how organic practices can restore both the land and livelihoods.

Her one-acre plot now tells a story of possibility. It includes mixed farming, land use planning, and Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration, all living examples of agroecology in action. Demand for her organic solutions is growing across the district. More importantly, her confidence has grown too. Betty no longer doubts her methods, or herself.



As the Climate Justice Lead at Oxfam Novib emphasized, Betty's transformation is part of a deliberate effort to elevate the voices of smallholder farmers, especially women, and to push back against the use of hazardous agrochemicals by promoting safe, locally rooted alternatives.

Alfred and Betty may come from different paths, but their stories are rooted in the same truth. When communities are trusted, trained, and supported, they can rise. What began as a training program has become a movement, led by farmers, grounded in knowledge, and powered by dignity.

This is what *ChaChaWaWa* has made possible.

It's no longer just about surviving the changing climate, it's about rewriting the future of farming, from the ground up. With local seeds, local wisdom, and local champions like Alfred and Betty, food sovereignty is no longer a dream. It's growing right here, in the hands of those who once thought they had no chance at all.

Keywords: **Pesticides / Agro-ecology / Seeds**



****Sowing Diversity = Harvesting Security SD=HS:*** An Oxfam Novib-led global program that strengthens farmers' rights and seed systems through community-based seed management, agrobiodiversity, and climate resilience—putting smallholder farmers, especially women, at the centre of innovation and food security. Now continued under the Cultivating Change Program.

****Naro (National Agricultural Research Organisation):*** Uganda's leading public agricultural research body, focused on generating and promoting knowledge and technologies that enhance agricultural productivity, food security, and sustainable development.

****NaSARRI (National Semi-Arid Resources Research Institute):*** A specialized institute under NARO, dedicated to researching and developing drought-tolerant crops and sustainable farming systems tailored for Uganda's semi-arid regions.

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