

# COMMON STRENGTH

## A VIEWING GUIDE

As mothers, farmers and entrepreneurs, women are key to ending global hunger. Women make up almost half of the world's farming labour force; however they still face many barriers to equality, and in most countries are more likely than men to face hunger.

### INTRODUCTION



Colleen Dyck, a farmer and entrepreneur from Niverville, Manitoba, travelled to western Kenya to live and work alongside small-scale farmer Lucy Anyango. Their experiences were documented in a short film called *Common Strength*, which explores the important role women play in ending hunger around the world.

The audience experiences learning from the point of view of Colleen, who was selected among farmers from across Canada who applied to participate in the project. Lucy was chosen from participants in a conservation agriculture (CA) project of Canadian Foodgrains Bank member World Renew through its local partner Anglican Development Services - Western.

# 79%

of women in least developed countries derive their income from agriculture.<sup>1</sup>



Women farmers receive only

# 5%

of all agriculture training services in many developing countries.<sup>2</sup>

## WHO WE MEET IN THE FILM



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### 1. **Lucy Anyango**

Lucy farms in Busia, in the western region of Kenya, on just under two acres of land. Her husband Jonathan lives and works in Nairobi and visits a few times per year. She lives on the farm with her five children ages two to 16. Through a Foodgrains Bank-supported project, Lucy learned conservation agriculture (CA) techniques to increase her crop production. She became a CA trainer and shares these techniques with others in her community through a community group called a *chama*.



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### 2. **Colleen Dyck**

Colleen lives in Niverville, Manitoba where she farms together with her husband. She has four children ages eight to 16. Their large farm grows grain and oilseeds, and Colleen is the CEO of her own all-natural energy bar business.



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### 3. **Dorcus Odunga**

Dorcus became interested in learning about CA after seeing the changes on Lucy's farm and the visible difference in the health of her children. Dorcus is the treasurer of Lucy's *chama* group and has become an avid spokesperson for the needs of women farmers in her community.



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### 4. **Joseph Namudeche**

Joseph is the local chief of the sub-county. Women from Lucy's *chama* group meet with elected officials like Joseph to raise their concerns.



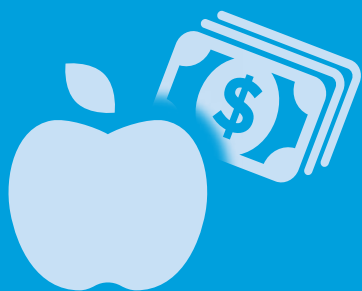
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### 5. **Christine Anyango**

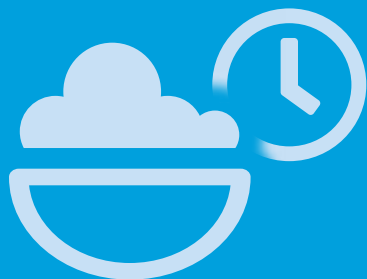
Christine is Lucy's fellow trainer. She is a member of the peer group of 20 CA trainers. Each member of the group has their own *chama* of 15-20 members, and collectively these men and women spread the word in their trainings, modelling new approaches to business, farming and household distribution of labour.

Members of the *chama* (a Kiswahili word meaning 'organization') meet once a month to socialize, learn CA techniques, and make small deposits into the group's savings account. Members can take loans to pay for school fees, pay for household necessities or invest in their own farms or businesses.

Research confirms that women re-invest up to **90%** of their incomes back into their own households—improving children's health, nutrition and education.<sup>3</sup>







In many countries **85-90%** of the time spent on household food preparation is women's time.<sup>4</sup>



## WHAT IS CONSERVATION AGRICULTURE (CA)?



Conservation agriculture is a farming approach that uses minimal soil disturbance, permanent soil cover, and crop rotations and cover crops to improve soil health. Compared to traditional practices, CA offers increased yield by reviving degraded soils, and ultimately means more food for the family. It has many advantages:

 Increased yields	 Increased health	 Increased soil health	 Decreased labour
Surplus food to sell, more income!	More nutritious foods to cook and eat!	More predictability in what the land can provide in the future!	More time to do other things!

When CA techniques are combined with participation in savings and loans groups (*chamas*), farmers get access to credit to purchase seeds and tools while growing their community relationships.

Lucy has transformed her small farm into something she can rely on to produce crops to sell and eat, despite erratic weather patterns. She saves seeds for future planting, increasing the number of nutritious vegetables for her family to eat.

As a CA trainer, Lucy shares her experience and knowledge with other women farmers in the community. The farmers build on each other's knowledge and strengths, boosting their capacity to adapt to the changing climate and sustainably produce food for their families.





*“The most obvious common bond that we had to begin with, that kind of set the tone for our relationship as it continued and grew, was definitely that we are both mothers. She works the land, she is a farmer, and we both depend on the weather for our livelihoods.”*

– Colleen Dyck

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Can you imagine yourself in Colleen or Lucy's place? How would you feel?
2. What word or phrase stuck out to you as you watched the film? Why?
3. In your own life, what work do you do that is unseen?
4. How might agriculture training help farmers like Lucy face challenges, such as malnutrition? Or a changing climate?



**Women are more likely than men to be affected by crises, and their access to aid in an emergency can be undermined by discrimination based on gender.<sup>5</sup>**



## CHECKLIST FOR EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH AGRICULTURE



- ✓ Is her voice represented in household, farming and community decision-making?
- ✓ Is she safe and free to move about?
- ✓ Can she own or rent land? Access water?
- ✓ Does she have access to credit or insurance?
- ✓ Are household tasks shared equitably (gathering water, fuel, cooking, cleaning, childcare, eldercare, etc.)?
- ✓ Are the tools, skills and training she needs available to her?

**If women farmers had the same access to resources as men, their yields would increase by 20-30%.<sup>6</sup>**



## SCRIPTURE REFLECTION



The text of Proverbs 31 is often used to highlight women's roles as domestic super-heroes, dutiful wives and mothers. It seems to celebrate women's invisible and under-appreciated labour. It presents a multitude of daily tasks—feeding, cleaning and taking care of children, for example. But there are also some surprising ones, too. The passage shows women tend to the work that is necessary, even when it may be traditionally understood as men's work. How might this challenge gender roles, both then and now?

**Prayer:** Creator, we acknowledge that we see the growing gaps between the some who are rich and the many on this earth who live in poverty. We give thanks for all those working to end hunger, to end poverty, and to build peace. We pray for development centered on the dignity of each person, that feeds not only their bodies, but nourishes their human strength and hope for the future. Amen.

***She is clothed with strength and dignity, and she laughs without fear of the future.***

- Proverbs 31:25



## YOUR VOICE IS NEEDED!

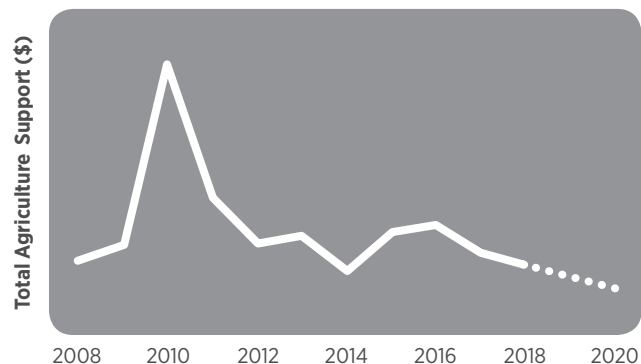


The development project that Lucy participates in was funded partially by Canadian aid—our government's official development assistance. Canadian aid supports our world's most vulnerable people in times of emergency, such as natural disasters or conflict, as well as through longer-term development.

After decades of progress, hunger has been rising again since 2015. Many of those who experience hunger work in agriculture. Yet, aid for agriculture is declining. The Foodgrains Bank is urging the Canadian government to provide greater support for small-scale farmers like Lucy.

Through actions like prayer, reflection and giving **you play a role in supporting the 821 million people who go to bed hungry each night**. By advocating, you can also make a difference by influencing decision-makers to take action. Reach out to your Member of Parliament!

### Canadian aid for agriculture<sup>7</sup>



Visit [www.foodgrainsbank.ca/letters](http://www.foodgrainsbank.ca/letters) to download the Harvest of Letters kit.

Would you like to host your own screening of Common Strength? Contact us at [foodjustice@foodgrainsbank.ca](mailto:foodjustice@foodgrainsbank.ca)

In times of scarcity women are generally the first to reduce the amount or quality of food they eat to make sure their families have enough.<sup>8</sup>



Canadian Foodgrains Bank is a partnership of 15 Canadian churches and church-based agencies working together to end global hunger.

### MEMBERS

ADRA Canada • Canadian Baptist Ministries • Canadian Lutheran World Relief • The Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada • Development and Peace—Caritas Canada • ERDO - Emergency Relief & Development Overseas (Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada) • Evangelical Missionary Church of Canada • Mennonite Central Committee Canada • Nazarene Compassionate Ministries Canada • Presbyterian World Service & Development • Primate's World Relief and Development Fund (The Anglican Church of Canada) • The Salvation Army • Tearfund Canada (previously World Relief Canada) • The United Church of Canada • World Renew

### SOURCES

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