

Liberia

Agriculture for Children's Empowerment (ACE)



Fourteen years of civil war and government corruption destroyed much of Liberia's economy, particularly the infrastructure in and around its capital, Monrovia. Many businesses fled during the years of conflict, taking capital and expertise with them. However, with the current state of peace and the election of a democratic government in 2006, both people and businesses have been returning to rebuild the war-torn nation. Blessed with access to water, mineral resources, forests and a climate good for agriculture, Liberia has the tools to again be an important producer and exporter of basic products and natural resources.

ACDI/VOCA's \$2.7 million, 5-year Agriculture for Children's Empowerment (ACE) project is part of USAID's new global initiative to improve child welfare using economic growth activities. ACE's underlying assumption is that sustainable reductions in children's vulnerability require improvements in their families' economic circumstances. Liberia's current socioeconomic indicators show a strong correlation between household economic status and child welfare. In addition, the country's successful reconstruction and economic

growth will require a well-educated and healthy workforce. However, since Liberia is still recovering from civil war, it is essential to address the conflict's social impact and foster more trusting relationships that support performance improvements on the farm, in the factory and in schools, and in addition provide more relevant and viable youth employment outlets. The importance of youth to Liberia's immediate future is readily evident with 44 percent of Liberia's population being 14 years old or younger and its population's median age being 18.

ACDI/VOCA, a member of the global USAID-funded Supporting Transformation by Reducing Insecurity and Vulnerability with Economic Strengthening (STRIVE) program, is taking an innovative approach that looks more broadly at the interdependence of key private and public sector networks or systems in achieving child welfare improvements in education, nutrition and economic position. Building on ACDI/VOCA's expertise and experience in leveraging local knowledge and resources, ACE fosters competitiveness in horticulture and rice value chains, extends the agricultural input industry into selected rural communities and strengthens community capacity to address critical constraints to invest more effectively in their children's current well-being and future success.

Using facilitation techniques, ACE leverages new teaching tools such as economic simulation games and *Farming as a Business* adult learn-



Project Profile

ing methods. It also helps improve access to agricultural inputs and markets as a means for communities to strengthen and make more relevant key relationships both within their families and communities and externally with other value chain actors. As these relationships become more valued and credible, ACE will facilitate information flows through public educational campaigns and promotional events on education, agriculture, nutrition, child labor and teen pregnancy that will be more effective at addressing these important issues.

ACE targets children and their families in Bong, Nimba and Montserrado counties. ACE's main entry points into the communities are schools and private agricultural input service providers. This strategy is informed by several considerations including the need to

- » improve the relevance of school as a broader information and service provider to communities
- » strengthen networks through which people access knowledge and resources
- » build a support infrastructure that promotes continuous innovation and upgrading of the communities' commercial, educational and nutritional activities
- » develop career and business growth paths around the agriculture industry
- » facilitate access to agricultural and educational services to help reduce the amount of time children spend on farm labor and caring for younger siblings.

Emphasizing knowledge management, ACE continuously tests the relevance and appropri-



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ateness of using enterprise development activities to improve children's welfare. ACE works with the Liberian ministries of education and agriculture, and local and international private and public organizations and firms.

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