

Liberia

ACDI and VOCA implemented a series of cooperative development programs in Liberia in the 1970s and 1980s. However, in 1989, the country plunged into the first of two civil wars which, except for a period of yearlong peace in 1997, devastated the nation until 2003. Liberia emerged with a new set of challenges: massive unemployment, untended farms, dilapidated tree crops, road and infrastructure gaps, virtually nonexistent public extension and health services and widespread poverty.

In 2006, Liberia took a first step towards stability by establishing a democratic government led by Africa's first female elected head of state. Two years later, ACDI/VOCA returned to Liberia to support the country's efforts to rebuild and grow by strengthening key sectors, reestablishing and increasing linkages to markets and building the capacity of government.

Support for Cooperative Development

ACDI and VOCA's early programs in Liberia supported the growth of cooperatives. In 1976, after conducting an assessment of cooperatives for USAID, ACDI implemented a six-year program that established supply and marketing cooperatives in Lofa County in the north. The project, funded by the World Bank and USAID, increased production of coffee, cocoa and rice.



From 1977 to 1982, ACDI extended its support to cooperatives through the **Assisting Cooperative Development Program**, which aided the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA). ACDI specialists in cooperative management and accounting helped to train the Cooperative Development Division's director and staff, and also provided advice on how cooperatives could facilitate rural development. The program provided direct assistance to cooperatives to expand and operate sustainably and helped establish the Cooperative Development Agency as a semi-autonomous entity under the auspices of the MOA.

Through the 1980s, VOCA supported cooperative development through volunteer consultant assignments in loan tracking

systems, credit procedures and policies, strategic planning and produce marketing. VOCA volunteers participated in the redrafting of the national cooperative law.

Building the Cocoa Sector and Expanding Livelihoods

Following 14 years of crippling civil war and government corruption, ACDI/VOCA returned to Liberia in 2008 to address critical development needs and opportunities across diverse sectors. Cultivated since the early 1900s, cocoa is Liberia's second most important commercial crop after rubber, but the country's cocoa sector has struggled to compete internationally. To address multiple challenges in this sector, ACDI/VOCA began the 2½ year, \$3.9-million **Livelihood Improvement for Farming Enterprises (LIFE)** project with USDA funding in 2008.

Currently in its second phase, LIFE has assisted over 10,600 cocoa smallholders in proper husbandry and post-harvest processing. Through **Farmer Field Schools (FFS)** and its **Farming as a Business (FaaB)** curriculum, LIFE has strengthened or helped create 35 producer associations that are now epicenters of farmer assistance, warehousing and marketing. LIFE has also established three commercial nurseries that will become long-term sources of high-quality planting material, a vital component of continued sector growth. Early in the project, LIFE successfully decentralized cocoa sales so that associations could sell directly to exporters for the first time, and in 2011, LIFE facilitated the first ever such sale in Liberia between two project-sponsored

associations and the Transmar Commodity Group.

In addition to increasing rates of cocoa production, LIFE developed new, internationally-compatible grading standards to help Liberian farmers sell their goods at premium prices. From 2007 to 2011, cocoa prices for LIFE-sponsored farmers increased by an average of 300 percent.

Empowering Youth, Revitalizing Value Chains and Improving Food Security

In 2008, 44 percent of Liberia's population was 14 years old or younger and the median age was 18. Following socioeconomic indicators that showed a strong link between economic growth and child welfare, ACDI/VOCA began the \$3.2 million, USAID-funded **Agriculture for Children's Empowerment (ACE)** program. ACE fosters competitiveness along horticulture and rice value chains and strengthens community capacity to invest more effectively in children's well-being and future success. In two years, 4,000 participants benefited from program activities, including agricultural and nutrition-based radio programs and forward-contract relationships that establish trusting commercial relationships between smallholder producers and buyers. ACE has currently been extended through 2014.

ACDI/VOCA has also supported the development of key value chains through its **Farmer-to-Farmer (F2F) West Africa Program**. A collaboration among ACDI/VOCA, Land O'Lakes and Winrock, F2F fields highly qualified volunteers to support international

agricultural development activities in Liberia, Ghana, Nigeria and Mali. In Liberia, ACDI/VOCA volunteer experts provide support to livestock and horticulture value chains. The program has been particularly successful through joint collaborative efforts between F2F, other USAID-funded projects and local host organizations.

In January 2013, Rev. Nerwah Tarlo, Executive Director of Tarlo Mixed Farm hosted a F2F volunteer and stated afterwards that the initiative “has identified a positive and more possible market for lead farmer and goat producer groups in Nimba [County], something which is highly unique.” In 2011, ACDI/VOCA began implementing another program under its F2F umbrella, the USAID-funded **Smallholder Oil Palm Support (SHOPS)** program. SHOPS focused on increasing the productivity and profitability of Liberia's sizable smallholder oil palm sector, in which half the crop is produced by rural smallholders.

In 2010, ACDI/VOCA combined its expertise in youth education, agricultural training and market-driven value chain approaches to reduce food insecurity among vulnerable rural populations. The **Liberia Agricultural Upgrading, Nutrition and Child Health (LAUNCH)** program, funded by USAID, focuses on the prevention and early identification of malnutrition. By providing supplementary food rations and including vulnerable households in livelihood activities, LAUNCH aims to promote health and nutrition at the household, community and facility level. In its first year, LAUNCH identified 36 food

distribution points and registered over 12,000 pregnant or lactating women and children under the age of 2. LAUNCH also works with schools and communities to increase support capacity for youth education and runs a youth “agroprenuer” training and grant program.

Community-Led Stewardship of Natural Forestry Resources

Liberia possesses extensive natural forest resources that could provide stable livelihoods for thousands of Liberians, but years of degradation and poor management have been responsible for income inequality and threats to sustainability. Since returning to Liberia, ACDI/VOCA has facilitated the development of policies and institutions to manage these resources transparently and equitably in collaboration with local communities.

In 2008, we participated in a Land Rights and Community Forestry Program. Working with Tetra Tech ARD, we ran the livelihoods component that empowered community forestry groups and ensured local participation in sustainable economic development and responsible stewardship of resources. ACDI/VOCA developed a **Community Forestry as a Business (CFaB)** curriculum to train participants to establish forestry enterprises, make sound business decisions and maximize profits from non-timber forest products.

In 2012, ACDI/VOCA again joined Tetra Tech ARD to begin the 5-year, \$1.5 million **People, Rules and Organizations Supporting the Protection of Ecosystem Resources (PROSPER)** project. Through PROSPER,

ACDI/VOCA continues its commitment to expand community forestry management, increase institutional capacity for business and conservation and improve the regulatory framework; together, these components represent long-term prosperity for thousands of rural Liberians.

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