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SUCCESS STORY

Hardworking Hope: Family Farmers Transform Markets

“I don’t have to wait for my husband when he is absent to make a decision... Other women see me put money in my purse and know that I am a good farmer.”

—Martha Duo, farmer



Photo credit — ACDI/VOCA

Martha and Richard Duo now grow cucumbers, okra, watermelons, maize, sweet potatoes, and a variety of greens. By cultivating a greater variety of crops, practicing crop rotation, keeping detailed records, and thinking of their farm from a business perspective, they have increased their family income.

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As Liberia recovers from civil war, farmers continue to struggle with and depend upon their crops. The Agriculture for Children’s Empowerment (ACE), an activity under the FIELD-Support LWA’s STRIVE program, has introduced the Farmer Financial Diary (FFD) tool which is helping farmers get a leg up by teaching them to better manage their farms as businesses. Applying a three-pronged approach of crop diversity, production management, and linkages to markets, along with the availability of a demonstration treadle pump for irrigation, the FFD gives farmers the power to make better decisions.

Some time back, at a village meeting in Kapaytuo, Dr. Richard Leep, a volunteer agronomist with ACDI/VOCA asked, “How many of you are farmers here?” As every hand went up, he continued, “How many of you are business men or women?” Only about half of the participants responded. Richard and Martha Duo of Nimba County responded positively to both.

ACE engaged the Duo family to plant more than rice and a plot of bitter ball. Within two and a half years, Richard and Martha Duo developed three to five acres of fields of cucumbers, okra, watermelons, maize, sweet potatoes, and a variety of greens. They came to fully understand that to support their family and make a profit, they must keep good records that include planting times, varieties planted, timely weeding, inputs, and sales. The Duos see the impact of the business and crop production training daily. “Buyers from Saclepea and Monrovia come to see my crops and I am encouraged. Especially in the dry season, we need money in the dry season,” Richard said.

Last year, Martha planted groundnuts and cabbage on her own plot of land. She is now practicing crop rotation and has planted a field of okra and cucumbers. Standing proudly in her field of cucumbers, Martha discussed her role as a lead farmer, independent and empowered in her contribution to the family. Richard remarked, “My wife was able to buy two mattresses for our children with the money she made from the farm.”

Martha and Richard do not sell all of their vegetables, as some farmers do. Boosting nutritional impacts by growing high quality, nutrient packed produce is an added benefit to their family. With the increasing awareness of the role vegetables and fruits play, they know that their children benefit from eating the wide variety of vegetables, dark greens, papaya, and other fruits that are available on their farm. Reducing protein and micronutrient deficiencies, particularly iron, zinc and Vitamin A is a real challenge in Liberia. From a nutritional standpoint, the children are strong and healthy, and working on the farm after school fosters important and practical skills as they work side by side with their parents.

Richard and Martha Duo, together with their five children, have transitioned their subsistence farm to a successful business. With the help of the project, they have increased their household income, enhanced their quality of living, and inspired their community.