



MODEL FARM SCHOOL & LIVELIHOOD PROGRAMS CHANGE LIFE OF YOUTH



Mercy Dahn, 17, had been working on her father's rubber farm in Karnwee, Nimba County, Liberia since she was 9 years old. At first, her job was to dig holes and plant young rubber trees. But as she grew older, the work became more challenging and dangerous. Mercy was tasked with cleaning the collection cups used to harvest latex. This involved filling the cups with acid to remove excess latex. The strong, unpleasant smell of the acid was irritating and affected her health. Mercy's duty eventually became even more labor-intensive; she carried heavy latex and solid rubber materials in buckets and bags on her head. At times, latex wastewater would drip onto her face and get into her eyes, nose and mouth. Mercy knew her family was depending on her, so she kept working.



Mercy Dahn after graduating from the ARCH Project's Model Farm School.



It is the economic hardship that caused my daughter to do the kind of work she did. But thank God it's over."

MERCY DAHN'S FATHER

Mercy's life began to change in 2014, when the ARCH Project, funded by the U.S. Department of Labor and implemented by Winrock International, came to Karnwee. In cooperation with schools and local officials, ARCH introduced the Model Farm School (MFS) program, initially enrolling 80 young people in Karnwee and the surrounding communities. Among them was Mercy, who quickly took an interest in each of the subject areas of the program, from vegetable production and livestock-raising to entrepreneurship skills that enable participants to start their own businesses.

Following her participation in the six-month long program, Mercy participated in a formal graduation ceremony, bringing together families, local leaders and private sector representatives. At the ceremony, Mercy received a startup kit to be used for starting a business in raising livestock.

Mercy's participation in the MFS program has impacted her life in numerous ways. First, it gave her the confidence to return to school. Although she might be behind in her education, Mercy desires to make up for lost time as much as possible. Second, Mercy has been inspired to find ways to give back to her community. She now serves as a peer mentor in her village, working with fellow youth and advocating for the elimination of hazardous child labor. When Ebola broke out in her community, Mercy stepped in to help educate her community about good hygiene and prevention practices.

Finally, while still focusing primarily on her school attendance, Mercy has also joined a group of five fellow MFS graduates to establish and manage a mini-piggery, using

pigs provided through the startup kits. So far, one pig has farrowed with four piglets, and the other pigs are healthy and doing well. The piggery is located in Mercy's home community, Karnwee, and will provide income for her, her family and her colleagues through the raising and selling of pigs to community members.

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Mercy and her family have found new ways of generating income.