

LISA Monthly Newsletter

November 2025

Liberian-Swedish Access Driven Rural Development Programme (LISA)

Key Points

- The LISA project started in July 2024
- Maintenance of LSFRP VARs started in August 2025
- The LISA TA team and three Track Management Consultants (TMCs) started in early 2025
- Construction of LISA VARs started in October 2025

Background

The LISA project has been established within MPW with Sida support to construct and maintain VARs in Bong, Lofa and Nimba counties.

The LISA project has the following aims:

- Establish **55 CMCs** at community level and **16 CBOs** at District level
- Construct **195.0 km** of new VARs
- Maintain **174.6 km** of VARs from LSFRP
- Spot improvements of **12.3 km** on Feeder Roads linking to VARs

The Ministry of Public Works (**MPW**), the Technical Assistant (**TA**), County and District staff and the three Track Management Consultants (**TMCs**) work as a single LISA team. Together they ensure that the the Community Management Committees (**CMCs**) and County Based Organization (**CBOs**) are trained and resourced, the VARs are well designed and constructed, long term maintenance plans are in place, and the communities are supported with and good quality guidance and advice is provided on gender and inclusion, agricultural development, opportunities for the VARs to enable sustainable economic growth.

Progress

VAR maintenance

Maintenance of the VARs that were constructed during LSFRP-3 began in September and is now underway in Lofa and Nimba. The first cycle of maintenance includes grass cutting and mitre drain clearing. Subsequent cycles will consist of structure maintenance, side drains and surface potholes.



VAR construction

After a huge effort by all parties assessing communities and forming CMCs and CBOs, selecting and designing VARs, planning construction schedules and procuring all necessary tools and materials, construction work started on 18 new VARs in all counties on the 20th of October.



These VARs are:

Bong

- Salala District
 - Moipata-Buteisue
- Suakoko District
 - Nunetulamue-Tomkpolore
 - Ballamah-Claymue
- Jorquellah District
 - Whomgbah-Dankpasue

Lofa

- Foya District
 - Sadu-Farmah
 - Sadu-Sayma
- Voinjama District
 - Vezela-Ballad
 - Bazagizia-Zayea

Nimba

- Gbelay-Geh District
 - Kpolay-Gboalay
 - Zualay-Gopea (Mobula)
 - Zualay-Nentepea
 - Zortapa-Kapia
 - Kailay-Prince
 - Kailay-Nalah
 - Larpea #1-Tontenpea
 - Larpea #1-Larmie
 - Larpea #2-Tonpea
 - Larpea #2-VOSIEDA farm



Payment systems

The most important requirement of a labour-based infrastructure project is prompt payment to workers. An assignment conducted in October, funded by the LISA research component, assessed financial institutions and recommended a payment system based on mobile money that will enable rapid and accountable payments through CBOs to workers within two weeks of the working period, in line with agreed-upon targets. The payment system was established during the last week of October.

The recommended system includes a Business and Finance Assistant to be recruited for each CBO, to manage payments and also coordinate responses to the initiatives presented by the Social Enterprise Specialist and described below.



Site visit by Sida

Officials from Sida joined members of the LISA PMT to visit project sites from October 27th to 30th. The visit covered 11 VAR maintenance and construction sites in all three counties, meeting TMC staff,

District officials, community leaders, CMC and CBO members, VAR workers, and VOSIEDA farmers. **Carl-Henrik Olaison Jacobsson**, the Sida Programme Officer, said, “It has been very useful to see the real work on the ground in Lofa, Nimba and Bong. We are very impressed by the dedication of community members in constructing the VARs. Thanks to all involved, including MPW, in the visits.”

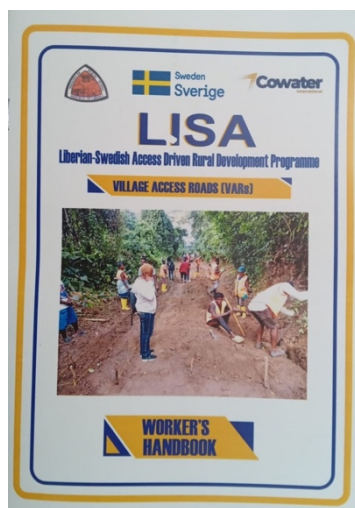


Collaborative Agreement

Particularly important contributions are made to LISA by County and District officials. An agreement was drafted during October to clearly detail the contributions of all, with clarity also given to how their costs – logistics and travel – are covered by the LISA budget allocations. These agreements were disseminated and signed during the last week of October.

Social and environmental safeguards

Workers on labour-based sites are often uninformed about various issues related to employment on work that carries a range of risks. Disputes often arise over confusion or lack of clarity over, for example, pay days, safety equipment, supervision and site management. The LISA team has produced a worker handbook that covers all likely issues in clear, non-technical language.



The handbook explains the rights of a worker when they are at work, such as prompt payment, safety equipment and respectful treatment, as well as their responsibilities towards the project and their fellow workers. It also includes contact details for people within the CMC, the TMC, and the LISA team, to be used for confidential reporting in instances of concern, complaint, or disagreement, for example, in cases of poor or abusive supervision. Copies are available from the LISA team.



Land issues

One specialist in the TA team has particular experience in resolving land disputes. While a project-wide assessment is not required in the same way that a social enterprise specialist assesses communities, land rights support is available when VAR works are hindered by disputes. An example of this occurred in October, when a disputed border between two communities proved to be an obstacle to the work starting. The land rights specialist met the District Commissioner and the two communities to try to find a solution. While not yet resolved, there is increased understanding on both sides. It is hoped that after other VARs in the area are constructed, both communities will be able to work together on the VAR connecting them.

Future Plans

First worker payment

Using the worker payment system, established during October, the first worker payment is due to be made on the 14th of November.

Supervision and bridge sites

All VAR designs by the TMCs have been checked by LISA engineers. However, since bridges are a vulnerable part of a VAR and subject to damage from rain and flood, for additional quality assurance every bridge site will be visited, with the TMCs, to discuss the proposed design and construction approach in the context of actual site conditions.



Enterprise and financial system training

The Social Enterprise Specialist submitted her community assessment during October. It includes a number of recommendations and initiatives that may help to stimulate and develop rural economies. These include agriculture warehouses, credit unions, labour contracting using the Koo labour system, and artisan resource centres.

She will carry out further visits during November, to allow CMCs and CBOs to select their preferred ideas and then to train the communities in how to take them forward, with the CMCs and CBOs as primary facilitators. It is hoped that remaining ideas may be added in later programme phases.

These visits in November will be combined with training of CBO Business and Finance Assistants.



Liberia National Infrastructure Conference

MPW is holding a conference in the second week of December with the above title and with themes relevant to LISA, including social infrastructure, roads, rural access, digital connectivity, and nature-based approaches. The LISA team has submitted an abstract for a VAR paper. Whereas a LISA presentation at the ICTA conference in Liberia in July concluded with the plans for formalization of VARs, this planned presentation will go further by detailing the many various ways in which a formalised VAR approach can trigger rural and national development.

Social and environmental safeguards

One element of the LISA Social and Environmental Safeguards Management Plan is the provision of a First Aid kit to each CMC, and the training of one member of the CMC to a nationally certified level of First Aid. Where possible, this training will be given to the Community Health Assistant, who is normally responsible for advice on sanitation and environmental health within a community, and who therefore has an understanding of health and the risks that can threaten it.

Research

The LISA research component continues to support the project with detailed proposals submitted in response to research requests. The research projects to date have been:

- RP1 – Induction Workshop and Training
- RP2 – Support to M&E
- RP3 – Financial Procedures for CBOs/CMCs
- RP4 – Impact Assessment of LSFRP VARs

Future research may focus on how communities may contract out their labourers, what steps are needed to prepare VARs for formalization, a demand-led VAR selection process and the establishment of district offices for CBO use, with a potential future role as a development hub.

Partnerships

LISA has started taking on interns to support, and learn from, our site activities. This will help to build up the body of professional staff who have experience of VARs for future involvement and leadership. It will also help to form partnerships with colleges and universities, so that when VARs become mainstreamed and commonplace these institutions are able to provide appropriate education and training to future community experts and VAR engineers.

Wuo Boayue, Aaron Tartee Dolo and Edwin J Sumo, from the University of Liberia and the Stella Maris Polytechnic University are part of the first intake of interns.



Wuo, Edwin and Aaron

They will start working in Bong, Lofa and Nimba respectively in November, supporting the LISA team and learning at the same time. All three are looking

forward to putting their technical skills in a social context, and contributing to national development.

More interns are expected soon from Bong County Technical College, Lofa County University and Nimba University.

Challenges

Back in March, the LISA team planned construction to start in October as the rains stopped and site work became easier. Construction has started on schedule but the rains seem to be lasting longer than expected. If they continue, construction schedules may have to be accelerated in order to complete on time. The LISA team take some satisfaction from working on VARs that provide sustainable rural access while making minimal contribution to the climate change that may be causing extended and unpredictable rains.

Academia

Angela Schulte is a recent graduate in Environmental Social Science from Stockholm University.

In March and April, after supporting LISA during an internship at Cowater, Angela spent six weeks with the project meeting communities in Bong, Lofa and Nimba, and researching her final-year thesis, titled: *Balancing Infrastructure Development and Environmental Sustainability – Community Perspectives from Rural Liberia*.



Angela's thesis is soon to be published but she has sent the following summary of her work and what she learned.

“This study explores how rural communities in Liberia view the new village access roads built through the Liberian-Swedish Access-Driven Rural Development

Programme. Infrastructure is often seen as important for economic growth because it helps people reach markets, schools, and health care. At the same time, new roads can damage the environment by causing deforestation, soil erosion, and loss of biodiversity. The aim of this research is to understand how local people balance these two sides: economic opportunities and environmental risks.



The study uses a qualitative approach with interviews and group discussions in different rural communities. By listening to local voices, it shows how people explain and experience the trade-off between development and the environment. The findings demonstrate that most community members value the immediate social and economic benefits of the roads, such as better mobility, easier access to services, and new income possibilities. Environmental concerns are present but often described in practical terms, for example when forests are needed for resources, protection or water. People usually do not speak of a clear conflict between economy and environment, but rather see both as connected and try to find a balance in daily life.

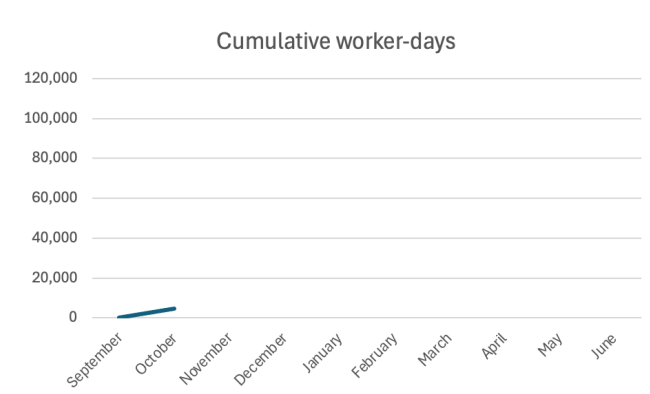
The conclusion is that rural communities in Liberia care both about economic improvement and about their natural environment, but they express this concern in ways that are linked to daily needs. For future projects, this means that development and environmental protection must go hand in hand, and local perspectives should play a central role in shaping sustainable strategies from the start.”

The LISA team will keep these lessons central as VAR planning and construction continues.

After graduation, Angela started full time employment with Cowater and remains close to the project and the people who she met.

The LISA M&E work continues, with the baseline survey to start in early November. The results of the baseline survey, carried out in communities where VAR construction has not yet started, will allow a later endline survey to indicate the impact of both the employment on the site and the improved access to the community.

A very important progress indicator on projects where rural infrastructure is constructed by local labour is the number of completed worker-days. This is the number of workers multiplied by how many days each has worked for. The total shows the progress of the work so far, in comparison with the total worker-days that we expect LISA to generate. It also shows, when multiplied by the daily wage of \$5, the cash that has been injected into the local economy by the project. The following chart shows the monthly worker-day total, against a target estimated from initial plans. To date, around 30% of the worker-days have been by women.



Person of the month

Festus Guan is a Quarter Chief from Zualay in Gbelay-Geh District in Nimba County. He worked on the construction of several VARs in Zualay during LSFRP and is now a maintenance supervisor on the VAR from Zualay to Gbonogai.

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)



“This road is very important, we are in modern life. We used to suffer before but now, the way our lives are changing, the road maintenance is very important in the community.”

Festus has a clear understanding of how rural life is changing and how important it is that people in rural communities not only have access but also take responsibility for it.

“The TMC people, along with the Ministry of Public Works, they are highly welcome in the district.”