

LISA Monthly Newsletter

July 2026

Liberian Swedish Access Driven Rural Development Programme (LISA)

Key Points

- LISA brings together the Ministry of Public Works (MPW), Technical Assistant (TA), three Track Management Consultants (TMCs), County and District officials, Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) and Community Management Committees (CMCs), and workers from the communities
- Work activities include:
 - Capacity building of CBOs and CMCs
 - Construction of new VARs
 - Maintenance of VARs from LSFRP
 - Improvement of Feeder Roads
 - Enterprise, agriculture, gender inclusion and leadership support for communities
- **USD568,000** has been generated to date for rural economies
- VARs have been completed and turned over to the CMCs in:
 - Bong County (5 VARs; 19.5 km)
 - Lofa County (16 VARs; 40.25 km)
 - Nimba County (23 VARs; 38.5 km)
- All LISA's work with communities and VARs will end in August. Reporting, audit and closure will be complete by December.

Background

The LISA project was established within MPW and with Sida support to construct long-lasting VARs in Bong, Lofa and Nimba counties.

The LISA project has the following objectives:

- 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
- Support **18** CBOs from LSFRP
- Spot improvements of **12.3 km** on Feeder Roads linking to VARs

MPW, the TA, County and District staff and the three TMCs work as a single LISA team. Together they

ensure that the CMCs and CBOs are trained and resourced, the VARs are well designed and constructed, long term maintenance plans are in place, the communities are supported with good quality guidance, and advice is provided on gender and inclusion, agricultural development, and opportunities for the VARs to enable sustainable and economic growth for all in the community.

Progress

VAR maintenance

Maintenance continues on all VARs constructed under LSFRP. The second cycle of maintenance is now complete and it is expected that the third and final cycle will be finished by the end of July. The

focus of the third cycle is to fill all potholes and erosion channels and repair all bridge damage.



At the end of the third cycle the LSFRP VARs will be in the same good condition as the new LISA VARs. Future VAR projects will therefore start with a network of around 370 km of good quality VARs.



Harmonisation of LSFRP CBOs

After VARs were constructed during LSFRP, CBOs were formed to raise funds and manage maintenance. LISA has taken a different approach, with CMCs at community level and CBOs at district level established during the planning period of each VAR. The latter is believed to be an improvement on the former and initial feedback confirms this.

In order to put LSFRP VARs under a management structure that will be just as supportive as the CMCs and CBOs of LISA, meetings are being held with LSFRP community level CBOs, LISA district level CBOs and county officials. These meetings are leading to the formation of a consortium in each district which will allow the LSFRP CBOs to share resources, ideas and county monitoring and supervision. This arrangement, similar to that of LISA with its layers of local management, district coordination and county oversight, will afford all VARs in this larger network a similar degree of support, and confidence in the future.



VAR construction

Work is now complete or nearly complete on all 75 planned VARs. The full list of VARs is:

Bong

- Salala District
 - **Moipata-Buteisue**
- Suakoko District
 - Nunetulamue-Tomkpolore
 - Ballamah-Claymue
- Jorquellah District
 - **Whomgbeh-Dankpasue**
- Zota District
 - **Naamai-Jarkai**
 - **Gbansuesulonmai-Boyanquellah**
- Panta District
 - Gbaita-Wumeh
 - Foequellah-Gbaita
 - Foequellah-Vayanhin
 - Gbarnga Siaquellah-Moses Village
 - Gbarnga Siaquellah-Gbaota
- Yealiquellah District
 - Voloblai-Gbaito Ta
 - **Gwenikalay-Kolliiekaju**
 - Pleemue-Jorker



Lofa

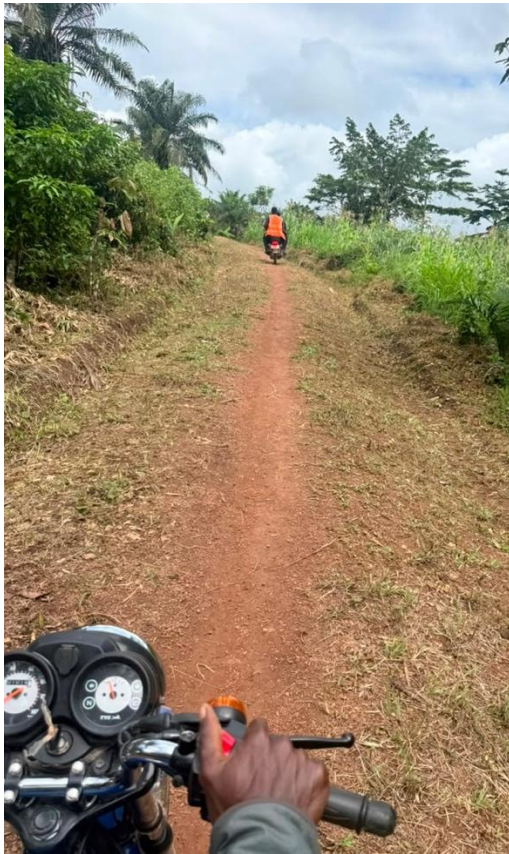
- Foya District
 - Sadu-Farmah
 - Sadu-Sayma
 - Fassapoe-Farm 1
 - Farmah-Farm 2
 - Farmah-Farm 3
 - Borliloe-Kolochoe
- Voinjama District
 - Vezela-Ballah
 - Bazagizia-Zayea
 - Jallamai-Kuyamai
 - Lawalazu-Kpakacongozu
- Kolahun District
 - Fassavulu-Hilgbelahun
 - Fassavulu-Mowulahun-Taninahun
 - Fassavulu – George Village
- Zorzor District
 - Zelemmai-Kpannazu
 - Zelemmai-Popowuzu
 - Zelemmai-Zeawutu
 - Kpassagizia-Dorlorzu



Nimba

- Gbehlai-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
- Zoe Gbor District
 - Korsein-Cowpea
 - Korsein-Yarpea 1
 - Korsein-Yarpea 2
- Sanniquellie Mahn District
 - Gborpa-William Dokie
 - Sehvi Gueh-Josephus Gbato
 - Sehvi Gueh-Prince Dolo
 - Mankinto-Mark Village
 - Mankinto-Bessonor
 - Bleemain-Gartain
 - Boapea-Nahnla
 - Boapea-Osaka
 - Mao-Jallah Quor
 - Borsonnor Town-VOSIEDA farm
 - Duo-Tiayee Town-VOSIEDA farm
 - Sopea-VOSIEDA farm 1
 - Sopea-VOSIEDA farm 2
 - Kintoma Town-VOSIEDA farm



- Zoe Gbao District
 - Zaglay-Voaplay
 - Zaglay-Gbopea
 - Zehplay-Gotuo
 - **Zehplay-Clepea**
 - **Troupoe-Fredrick**
 - **Troupoe-Pa Moses**
 - Duowine-Tarpor Siah
 - Duowine-Gbopoa



- Bain Garr District
 - Whynor-Jefferson Wuo
 - **Whynor-Kamawee Village**
 - Whynor-Alphonso Canada
 - Yelekorlee-Fongowee
 - Tundi-Payepea

- Tundi -Zumba
- Doe District
 - Keinpea – Manlor
 - Nuopea – Toepea
 - Nuopea - Barpea

The construction activities on these VARs include clearing, grubbing, de-stumping, carriageway formation, drain opening and bridge construction.



VARs and VARs

Some readers may be wondering why Village Access Roads have been featured in the football World Cup. The LISA team presume that this is because both are innovative and able to involve more people in key decisions. However, given the many offside and penalty controversies, we are confident that our VARs will prove more sustainable than Video Assistant Referees.



VAR turnovers

The May newsletter detailed the final steps in the completion of a VAR. There are three levels of VAR turnover successively transferring responsibility from the LISA team to the CMC, then to the District, and finally to the County.

1. **Turnover to the CMC**, after which the CMC is in charge of the VAR
2. **Turnover to the District**, following district-level training sessions in management and leadership, after which the District will coordinate its VARs
3. **Turnover to the County**, after which the County takes responsibility for all its VARs

The LISA team is currently focused on CMC turnovers. District and county turnovers will start in late July. The VARs **in bold** in the lists above have been turned over to CMCs.



Specialist support

The sustainability of a VAR depends on the quality of the construction and maintenance, but also on the capacity of the CMCs to manage, the increased agricultural production to carry to market, the inclusion of all community members in supporting and benefitting from the VAR, and the social enterprises that generate funds for maintenance and expansion. LISA specialists in these fields are finalising their plans for a busy final few weeks to provide training, support and advice to farmers, CMCs and CBOs so that they are in the best possible position when their VARs move from project deliverable to productive community infrastructure.

County progress meetings and site visits

Coordination meetings and site visits with county authorities continue to go ahead. They enhance the level of ownership and understanding at county, district and community levels.



County continuity meetings

As VARs are turned over, the CMCs take on responsibility for daily management and maintenance. District and County authorities provide coordination and oversight. The LISA team are currently supporting this structure at all levels but from September onwards, the Counties will assume the lead role in the VAR structure.



From the 6th to the 9th of July, meetings were held with County Superintendents, Development Officers and other officials in Bong, Lofa and Nimba to discuss the nature and practicalities of this role.

Discussions covered budgets, resources, staffing, stakeholders, monitoring cycles and accountability, with an

emphasis on both the sustainability of the completed VARs and how the VAR networks might expand to give access to more rural communities.

The Counties were very receptive to the discussions and eager to include VARs in their monitoring visits and infrastructure sector coordination meetings. The LISA team is confident that all VARs will be well managed from September onwards.

Feeder road improvements

The LISA project budget includes an allocation to improve the feeder roads that connect LSFRP and LISA VARs to the wider road network, so that agriculture production may safely arrive at market.

These improvement works (referred to as ‘spot improvements’) will be complete by the end of July.



Case Study: Ngoyilangee Development Cooperative

The story of Ngoyilangee Development Cooperative, proudly known as "One Voice," is a remarkable example of how infrastructure, dialogue, and economic empowerment can transform divided communities into a united force for development.

The cooperative was established through the Village Access Road (VAR) Project in Kolahun District, Lofa County, bringing together the four communities of Hilgbelahun Town, Fassavolu Town, Taninahum Town and Morwulahun Town.



For many years, these communities were separated by what they described as "Bush conflict." The conflict left deep divisions, preventing them from talking to one another, sympathizing with each other, or working together. Trust had been broken, and cooperation seemed impossible.

Everything changed with the establishment of the Village Access Road (VAR). Beyond improving transportation, the project created a unique opportunity for all four communities to come together under one CBO. This marked the beginning

of reconciliation and laid the foundation for lasting peace and collaboration.



The Social & Business Enterprise component of the project further strengthened this new relationship by promoting trust, shared responsibility, and inclusive leadership. Through a participatory process, members selected one leader from each community to ensure equal representation.

Despite this progress, the group was initially reluctant to start a business because members believed they

lacked the financial resources to succeed. Through continuous training, mentoring, and monitoring visits by the LISA team, their confidence gradually grew. A series of meetings involving the CBO, local authorities including the District Commissioner, the District Inspector, the CBO Board Chair and the BFA resulted in a breakthrough.

Recognizing the group's commitment, the District Commissioner provided a loan of LD\$20,000, enabling the cooperative to launch its first enterprise.

Using the loan, members purchased four tins of palm oil (six gallons per tin), caustic soda, and other raw materials to begin producing locally made "Iron Soap". What began as a modest investment quickly grew into a thriving community business.



The VAR proved to be more than just a road. It became a pathway to economic opportunity. As the shortest and fastest route connecting surrounding villages and communities, it opened new markets

for the cooperative's products. Demand for the locally produced soap increased steadily, leading the group to produce soap every two weeks. The cooperative also holds twice-monthly rotational meetings, ensuring that all four communities continue to participate equally in decision-making.

Today, the cooperative has achieved significant milestones. The initial LD\$20,000 loan has been fully repaid, and the group has accumulated LD\$21,000 in savings, demonstrating sound financial management and a growing culture of self-reliance.

Equally impressive is the cooperative's leadership, where women occupy 60 percent of leadership positions, while men hold 40 percent, reflecting the project's commitment to inclusive participation and women's empowerment.



Today, Ngoyilangee Development Cooperative truly lives up to its name "One Voice." Communities once divided by years of conflict now sit together, plan together, work together, and build their future.

Future Plans

End of LISA

The VAR story is nearing the end of its first chapter, in which the approach is trialled, proved, improved and prepared for mainstreaming. The next chapters will show how VARs can be constructed through project or self-help, can be maintained by their own communities, can encourage local development, and can last for many years, upgrading to vehicle roads if necessary.

LISA site work ends in August, and will be followed by reporting and audit before closure in December.

CMCs and CBOs will manage their VARs, under the supervision of their county administrations, with MPW continuing to provide technical guidance.

In due course, further support will be found, with the expectation that one more phase will be sufficient to get policies, standards and procedures ready for VARs to become part of the national road network.

Thereafter, the potential for VARs is great, helped by the fact that after construction is complete, there is no maintenance burden on any external party, with all running costs being covered by income generated through VAR usage and associated community initiatives.

A future can be envisaged where all rural communities have a VAR, perhaps with 1,000 km or more of VARs in each county, and rural isolation, lost harvests and underdevelopment are just memories.



Closing event

The LISA launch on the 23rd of June 2025 brought all parties together and got the project, and specifically the TMC training, off to a good start.

A closing event is being arranged to be held in Gbarnga on the 5th of August 2026, and invitations are being sent out. Presentations will cover the history of VARs, the LISA project, and what the future may hold.

VAR turnovers

All VARs are expected to be turned over to their CMCs by the end of July, and then to their Districts. Where possible, they will be turned over to their County Administrations at this closing event above.

Research

Research projects

The LISA research programme has recently undergone some minor changes.

Ongoing research projects into VAR selection and the involvement of motorcycle riders and unions in the VAR process will remain under the leadership of Swansea University, the original main research partner.



Two research initiatives that have not yet started – technical studies of timber strength, bridge design and erosion prevention, and the updating of the VAR social and technical manuals – will be carried out directly by LIDA-R, previously the local partner under sub-contract to Swansea University. This work will also include the dismantling, transport and reconstruction of a bridge with a structure known as ‘da Vinci’ from one site in Gbarnga to another in Bong County.



It is believed that this new arrangement will allow these remaining two projects to be completed within the available time.

Challenges

VAR completion

LISA site activities will finish by the end of August. However, all TMCs are being asked to collect large amount of data that will be collated and stored to help those managing a future VAR phase, in whatever form that may take, to more quickly plan, cost and start implementation. To allow this data collection, and to give time for any remaining issues to be dealt with and CMCs to be mentored, all site works are expected to complete by the end of January. There are challenges in this, particularly as rains are affecting all districts and all VARs, but progress remains good.

Lest the rain be seen as only a hindrance, it should be noted that unpaved roads such as VARs, rely on a dense grass root structure stabilising the soil, strengthening the surface and preventing erosion. Indeed, after the first rains have been survived, most earth roads are very stable and easy to maintain.

Bridges

The bridge construction backlog was noted last month and resources accordingly increased and reallocated. All parties are commended for their efforts in getting the bridge programme back on track.



Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)

Baseline and endline surveys

The endline survey started in June and completed in mid July, with the final report to be ready by the end of August.

Normally endline surveys are carried out after all work is complete and initial impacts can be seen.

The end of site activities in August make this impossible, so the survey was carried out while final works were ongoing. If a VAR under survey was not yet complete, instead of being asked about the new possibilities for travel, community members were asked for their expectations after the VAR is open. While being more subjective than objective, this approach is still able to identify likely impacts and important lessons to learn.

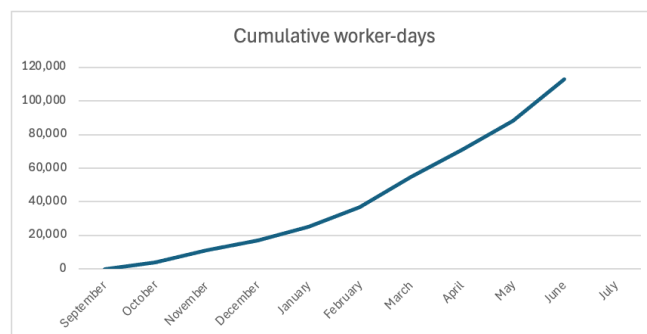


Final evaluation

A national consulting company has been selected to carry out the final independent evaluation of LISA. The contract for this work is being reviewed prior to signature, with work expected to start in the last week or July, with the final report ready in September.

Worker-days

With work complete or underway on all VARs, the cumulative number of worker-days continues to increase, with a total to the end of June of 113,500 with just under half by female workers, and generating around \$568,000 for rural economies, well over half a million USD.



Person of the month

Moses Apay lives in Moipata, at the start of the Moipata-Buteisue VAR in Salala District, Bong County. Before LISA, he was the youth secretary for his community, but when work on the VAR started, he was selected as Tools Clerk and member of the CMC.



He stored the tools in the warehouse, distributed them fairly to the workers, and also helped with work supervision when needed.



Shortly after the work started, the position of Business and Finance Assistant was opened in each district to help manage workers payments and other financial and administrative matters. The community was asked to nominate a candidate and chose Moses because of his hard work, commitment and dedication to the progress of the work. In this position, Moses worked closely with the Engineers on site to make sure that workers'

attendance always matched their assigned tasks, as well as ensuring that all payments to workers were correct and on time. Whenever BFA training was arranged, he took the opportunity to learn more.

A few months later, the TMC working in Bong County, Longman Engineering Services, had a vacancy for a technician. Moses was encouraged to apply by his friends and was selected for this position. He was then transferred from his home of Moipata to Panta District where he is the technician on the Foequelleh to Gbaita VAR, constructing earthworks and bridges, and training the community in maintenance.

Just as the VARs in Moipata and Foequelleh are giving communities the opportunity to develop themselves, so too has LISA given Moses the opportunity to help himself and his family.

“I promise to pass on what I have learned to help other people and other communities.”