

LISA Monthly Newsletter

October 2025

Liberian-Swedish Access-Driven Rural Development Programme (LISA)

Key Points

- The LISA project started in July 2024
- The LISA TA team started in March 2025
- The three TMCs started in June 2025
- The LISA Annual Review Meeting was held on the 29th of August
- Maintenance of LSFRP VARs started in August 2025
- Construction of LISA VARs will start 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 **16** CBOs and **55** CMCs
- 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

VARs will be managed by CMCs under the supervision of District based CBOs.

TMCs arrange and manage the day-to-day implementation of LISA:

- Longman Engineering Services in Bong
- Olow IGC in Lofa
- BK Enterprise in Nimba

MPW, the TA, and County and District staff work as a single LISA team. They supervise the TMCs and provide additional expertise with engineering,

community management, gender inclusion, agricultural productivity and social enterprise specialists.

Progress

Annual Review Meeting

This meeting was held on the 29th of August 2025 and was attended by senior MPW and Sida officials and many in the LISA PMT.



The meeting included a summary of the recent history of feeder roads and VARs between MPW and Sida, a detailed presentation on LISA progress and plans, and discussion of technical standards, the

need for effective endline surveys and opportunities for future collaboration.

The Minister of Public Works concluded the meeting by thanking all who attended and expressed both commitment to the LISA project and the need for rehabilitation and maintenance of feeder roads.



VAR final selection

The MCA workshops in August 2025 selected village footpaths/tracks for upgrading to VARs in each District. These were then surveyed in detail during late August and September 2025. In a few cases these surveys identified tracks that would be very costly to upgrade, for instance if needing a long embankment across a swamp. The remaining tracks will now be constructed.

The final list includes around 15 km of VARs leading to Grow-2 or VOSIEDA project sites.



CMC and CBO formation

VAR sustainability depends on active and supportive community structures. LSFRP established a CBO at each VAR but this proved administratively cumbersome. LISA's VARs will be

managed by less burdensome community management committees at the VARs, managed and coordinated by a CBO in each district.

Community staff in the TMCs and the PMT established CMCs in all communities selected for a VAR and a CBO in all LISA districts, as shown in the photos in this newsletter. Applications were also submitted for the legal documents required by CBOs.

Strategic planning

As well as community engagement and VAR survey and design, the TMC training in June and July also covered construction planning under time and resource constraint.



After the completion of the community profiles and the detailed designs, PMT staff arranged workshops to support each TMC in this planning process. Each workshop considered issues such as the number of available workers and possible worker rotation, the construction standard that is likely to be appropriate for each VAR, the procurement of equipment and materials, and the use of parallel construction supervision teams. These strategic plans should allow construction to complete within budget and before the return of the rains in April or May.

Specialist assessments

The central activities of CMC/CBO formation and detailed design will allow a VAR to be constructed, but if that VAR is to support the community to develop, more is needed. The social enterprise, gender and agriculture specialists made assessments in each district of the potential for economic and inclusive development, and were joined by a finance specialist under Swansea University support, to determine the most effective way to distribute payments and wages through the newly established CMC/CBO structures.

The specialists are currently reporting back with recommendations for future community support.



Pre-construction training

For construction work to start, the CBOs, with their members from the CMCs, need to understand their community contracts, the roles of all parties, and implementation aspects such as labour recruitment, task rates, payment, site safety, inclusion and social and environmental safeguards.

PMT and TMC staff spent the last week of September training CBOs in these aspects.



VAR maintenance

The LISA team committed in March to maintain 174 km of LSFRP VARs in addition to constructing 195 km of new VARs. This maintenance support required the reactivation of some CBOs and the renewal of legal documents. Maintenance work began in

Nimba in the first week of September and is due to start in Bong and Lofa in early October.

Future Plans

VAR maintenance

The maintenance work on LSFRP VARs has been planned as three cycles, each with site activities appropriate to the site conditions and the likelihood or otherwise of rain. In order to encourage the CBOs to see the maintenance as a long term commitment, LISA is paying worker wages during the first cycle, before reducing this support in the second and third cycles, so that the CBO will be ready to self-manage thereafter.

VAR construction

Following establishment of CMCs and CBOs, and approval of detailed designs and plans, construction is expected to start in all counties in the first week of October. In order to make supervision more efficient, each TMC will work through their districts in turn, typically with the senior field staff getting work started and then leaving it in the hands of others in the team and moving to the next district. Where necessary the TMCs will run two or more site teams in parallel.

Training

After work starts, another cycle of training will be carried out. This will include financial procedures for payments and wages, in time for the first wage payment at the end of October (two weeks of work, plus two weeks to administer and pay), First Aid training for the member of each CMC who will act as an on-site First Aider, and other topics which will emerge from the recommendations of the enterprise, inclusion and other specialists.

C-MAP

Long term VAR management is in line with the measures in the Community Maintenance Action Plan, or C-MAP. This plan shows how voluntary community labour should be used to maintain the VAR and how funds should be raised to pay for purchased materials and skilled labour.

LSFRP CBOs had C-MAPs but some need to be reactivated and updated; new C-MAPs will be established for LISA VARs.

It is important that C-MAPs are in place well before construction work and external support ends. It is intended that work to develop the C-MAPs will begin before the end of October.



Research

The LISA research component with Swansea University and LIDA-R has to date trained the TMCs, supported the work on the M&E logframe and indicators, developed procedures for payments and wages through the CMCs and CBOs, and started an impact assessment of LSFRP VARs. Discussion continues to identify the next research topics and build up a pipeline of research for the months ahead. Potential topics include technical innovation, the roadmap to VAR formalization, the revision of VAR manuals, the inclusion of transport providers, and the establishment of a demand-led VAR selection process.

Social and environmental safeguards

Even though a VAR has less impact on a community and an environment than does a highway, it is still necessary to assess any negative impacts and ensure that prevention or mitigation measures, referred to as safeguards, are in place. Negative impacts can come from unfamiliar and unsafe work, poor quality tools, abusive supervisors, and pollutants released into water supplies.

Many safeguards documents are endlessly detailed and hard to use; LISA's documents are intended to be concise, understandable and usable. The materials currently include a guideline which describes likely risks and appropriate measures, a handbook for workers that explains their rights but also their responsibilities, a list of recommended PPE, and a checklist suitable for CMC, TMC or PMT staff to assess each site.

The safeguards will be trailed as work starts, and developed, with the central objective of protecting the community and the environment through which the VAR passes.

Partnerships

Close working relationships have been formed with Grow-2 and VOSIEDA field staff, and eleven tracks to their agricultural projects have been selected for upgrading. This relationship has been important to ensure that the communities concerned are aware that VARs are not a one-off top-down gift but a mutual investment from both parties that will, if self-maintained, support the community and the objectives of the agricultural projects for many years to come.



Challenges

Last month's main challenge was to be ready for construction in October. This is expected to be met.

For the coming month, the main challenge is to show that the carefully made plans can be transferred effectively from paper to the less predictable environment of a rural site, and completed within seven to eight months.

During the last month two of the PMT have left to take up academic opportunities elsewhere. Very competent replacements have been found and are already at work. We wish James and Dave well in their new roles.

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)

The indicators that will be used to monitor the progress and the impact of the VARs have been finalised with the support of Swansea University.

Progress will be monitored by the length of VAR, and number of bridges constructed, the time and cost to do the work, and the number of workers on site, how long they work for, and how much they earn.

Impact indicators include the change in traffic and loading along the route, the number of CMCs and CBOs effectively managing the VARs, and the developments in the community as a result of the wages earned by the workers.

A baseline survey of traffic counts and community interviews is to be carried out in October 2025.



It is hoped that future newsletters will include graphs that show the progress of the work, in terms of completed kilometres and worker-days.

Person of the month

James Gaye Wehpue is a farmer who lives in Zuaplay Town in Doe District, Nimba County. For many years people in Zuaplay had to walk if they wanted to go to markets, health centres and schools. James worked as a supervisor on the construction of his community's VAR during the LSFRP project in 2023. The VAR made a big difference to the lives of the community as traders could now come to the community by motorcycle to buy farm produce.



“After the construction people travel from Saclepea, Ganta and Monrovia to our villages to buy our goods from the village.”

Community members earned money working on the VAR and then selling their produce in nearby markets. All in the community benefitted: community dwellers, farmers, market traders, children and motorcycle riders.

“I learned how to construct road without going to school and from the construction I made a bigger farm.”

James is a member of the Zua-Lorkar Development Association, the CBO that manages the VAR. Since LSFRP the CBO arranged some maintenance of the VAR twice a year and is now working with LISA to collect funds and ensure that the VAR remains in good condition in the long term. A maintenance cycle started in early September and will be followed by more cycles early next year.

“I want to give thanks and appreciation to the Swedish Government for using their tax payer money to turn our footpath into a VAR, not forgetting the Ministry of Public Works. Thanks!”