

LISA Monthly Newsletter

August 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
- LISA induction, launch and training were carried out in Bong County in June 2025
- There is now a consistent approach to community and technical issues across the LISA team
- The following are underway: VAR final selection, community engagement and detailed designs

Background

The LISA project has been established within MPW with Sida support to continue the work on rural feeder roads and track access which was started in the previous LSFRP.

The LISA project has the following aims:

- Establish **16** Community Based Organisations and **55** Community Management Committees
- Construct **195.0 km** of VARs (village access roads) in Bong, Lofa and Nimba Counties
- Maintain **174.6 km** of previously constructed VARs in Bong, Lofa and Nimba Counties
- 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.

Track Management Consultants (TMCs) organise the CMCs and CBOs, design the VARs, train the labourers and supervise the site work and the

management. BK Enterprise work in Nimba, Olow Integrated Group of Companies work in Lofa and Longman Engineering Services work in Bong.

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.

The LISA team coordinates closely with Sida programme management, with frequent site visits, progress meetings and technical discussions.

Progress

Inception Report

The LISA TA Inception Report was submitted at the end of May and was approved by the Project Director, senior MPW officials and Sida.

Induction-Launch-Training Event

The LISA team planned a three-part event to close the inception period and move into implementation. This event was led and managed by the Swansea University/LIDA-R team, to which research and training activities have been sub-contracted.

Induction Workshop

The first part was a discussion between LISA, TMC senior staff and SU/LIDA-R of key technical issues which had led from a separately funded site-based research project during March. This discussion concluded that it is appropriate to revise the community management structures to District level CBOs supervising CMCs at each VAR, and to apply a lower cost 'Basic Access' standard on VARs where traffic and maintenance capacity might be lower than elsewhere. The workshop also discussed possible future research topics and the revision of VAR manuals written in 2021.

Launch

A week after the induction workshop, a day long launch in Gbarnga brought together senior MPW officials, County officials, Sida, TMCs, LISA and others to discuss the history of tracks and VARs in Liberia, the LISA project ahead and the future beyond. Notable contributions were from the Senior Senator from Bong, Hon. Prince K Moye Sr, the three County Superintendents, and a team from Old Yourpea (featured below).



The launch ended with a formal handover of the VAR manuals from the LISA Project Director to the MPW Deputy Minister and the Assistant Minister for Community Services.



Training

Two weeks following the launch were spent in Gbarnga training the TMCs and MPW staff in three distinct aspects of VAR implementation: engaging with communities and forming management structures; surveying tracks and designing VAR improvements; and planning all activities under time and resource constraints. The training included working with a nearby community to establish a CMC and construct 500 metres of VAR.



Additional training sessions included maintenance techniques and gender awareness.

During this period the LISA team also finalised VAR shortlists for each county.

After the training was complete, the TMCs mobilized to their counties and started the following activities:

VAR final selection

The VAR shortlists which led from the surveys in late 2024 and validation during May 2025 are being reduced to the final selection. Districts with few shortlisted VARs go ahead with their entire selection; those with more VARs will use a multi-criteria analysis (MCA) process during August. Preparations are being made for the district level MCA workshops. In addition, 15-20% of the VARs have been directly allocated to communities where Sida-funded agricultural projects are operating, on the basis of their commitment to both construction and long term voluntary maintenance work.

Community profiling and engagement

Where the VARs have been selected, the TMCs, with LISA support, are working in the communities, carrying out a profiling process to assess capacity for labour provision and management, and then establishing the required CBOs and CMCs, the latter being formed from within the existing community structures. The TMCs will work in other communities after the MCA process.

Detailed surveys and designs

Where the VARs have been selected, the TMCs, with LISA support, are carrying out detailed surveys of the selected tracks in order to design the required works and estimate costs and construction times. Designs will consider the use of the Basic Access standard. The TMCs will survey other VARs after selection by the MCA process.



The community engagement and detailed designs will then form the basis for construction plans that are compatible with contract end dates.

Maintenance of VARs from LSFRP

All VARs constructed during LSFRP are to be maintained under LISA, with support given to CBOs to reactivate and restart maintenance, if required. Similar community engagement and surveys have been carried out in these communities. A short maintenance training course was carried out between the induction workshop and the launch.

Future Plans

Overall programme

August will be busy with the start of the maintenance of previously constructed VARs; the district level MCA workshops and the finalization of all VAR selections; specialist gender, enterprise and agricultural guidance from the TA team; the detailed surveys and design work; the community profiling and establishment of CBOs and CMCs; and the strategic planning of all construction.

Construction of new VARs will start in late September or early October, with intended completion in April or May of 2026.

As construction starts, focus will move to establishing Community Maintenance Action Plans (C-MAPs) that will be used by the communities for long term VAR management.

After the submission of the inception report, the overall programme is to: select VARs, identify and train CBOs and management committees, and make all necessary preparations between June and September; carry out all construction work, mostly during the dry season from October to March 2026; and then spend the remaining months ensuring that the VARs will be sustainable in the long term under community management, funding and maintenance.

Partnerships

Contact has been strengthened with Grow-2 and VOSIEDA through the inclusion of VARs that will provide access to their project sites.

The Agricultural Specialist in the TA team will coordinate with Ministry of Agriculture staff in Bong, Lofa and Nimba to ensure that the VARs will support agricultural productivity improvements.

Challenges

The main challenge facing the LISA team remains the need for all preparations to be ready for construction from September onwards. The current rains are proving to be heavy but preparations remain on track.

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)

Recent M&E activities have focused on laying the groundwork for upcoming project activities and assessing the progress of ongoing initiatives. The primary goal was to ensure that all project activities were on track and to gather data to inform future decision-making. The month of June was concerned with planning the baseline survey for the project corridors. The baseline survey is scheduled for August, 2025.

In July, the team made several baseline community entry/site visits across Bong, Lofa, and Nimba counties to create a network with the community stakeholders as well as assess project progress.



It was an insightful experience, as the trip provided the team with a clearer picture of the fieldwork. Feedback from the communities during our meetings showed great spirit of enthusiasm. The need for the VAR cannot be overemphasized, according to many of the locals. One key question/concern that was common from the angle of the locals was “When will actual construction commence?” This speaks volumes about how willing they are to participate in terms of reception and availability of labour.

Though actual track construction is scheduled to commence in October, the TMCs, county engineers, and social workers were seen deployed in all three counties carrying out community mobilizations and tracks/roads surveys. As the goal of the project is to reduce isolation by connecting rural dwellers to socio-economic services as well as reducing the gap of gender inequality and reducing infant & maternal mortality, amongst others, through improved access, the output of the kilometres of VAR constructed will be vital to measuring the outcomes and impacts of the projects. To this end, the baseline survey, when conducted, will capture all relevant information and set the basis for measuring progress.



Group of the month

Each LISA newsletter includes the story of an individual or group associated with the project and tells how they hope to contribute to its work and results.

Old Yourpea in Nimba was selected during LSFRP3 for VAR construction. The Korwro United Development Association CBO was established in 2022 and since then has managed five VARs without direct support. The CBO and the community have carried out routine maintenance every three months, and have also collected funds for repair work, currently with over USD1000 in their account.



Two representatives from the CBO – Sylvester Roberts and Jackson Karhou, who collect and administer funds, and plan and supervise site work respectively – attended the LISA launch in June and gave a well-received presentation about their work, operation of the VARs, and their hopes for the future, which motivated all participants for the months ahead.

They also took the opportunity to thank LSFRP for the previous support with construction, and the LISA team and the Swedish Government for the renewed support with long term maintenance planning.

Korwro United Development Association is being supported by LISA to further improve and is held up as an example of how a community, with external support over a short period, can fund and manage rural infrastructure for the benefits of all.