

LISA Monthly Newsletter

September 2026 – final edition

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 included:
 - 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
- LISA site work has now finished
- VARs have been **constructed** in:
 - Bong County (14 VARs; 57.4 km)
 - Lofa County (17 VARs; 44.8 km)
 - Nimba County (42 VARs; 87.4 km)
- VARs have been **maintained** in:
 - Bong County (2 VARs; 10.2 km)
 - Lofa County (21 VARs; 71.7 km)
 - Nimba County (24 VARs; 92.7 km)
- The national VAR network now has **120 VARs** of **364 km**
- **USD 665,520** has been generated for rural economies, with most worker payments made using mobile money

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 had the following objectives:

- Establish community CMCs and district CBOs
- Construct new VARs
- Maintain VARs from LSFRP
- Support CBOs from LSFRP
- Improve critical sites on linking Feeder Roads

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.

Completed work

Maintenance of LSFRP VARs

Three maintenance cycles have been carried out on the VARs constructed by LSFRP in 2022-23. These 47 VARs, totalling 174.6 km with 130 bridges, are

now in good condition and form one part of the emerging national VAR network.



Revitalisation of LSFRP CBOs

LSFRP established 18 CBOs to manage these 47 VARs. LISA has supported these CBOs with training, resources and mentoring, and has brought them into the new district and county supervision structure. The CBOs will now be able to fund and manage their VARs in the long term.



Construction of VARs

LISA has worked with communities to construct 73 new VARs, with 261 bridges and a total length of 189.6 km. These VARs form the second part of the national VAR network.



Community Management Committees

66 CMCs were established, one within the main community of each VAR, using existing leadership structures. The CMCs managed the recruitment of workers, sourcing of materials, storage of tools, and supervision of local labour for the construction of the VARs. Community Maintenance Action Plans (C-MAPs) were arranged with the CMCs to manage and control funding and maintenance of the VARs in the long term.

Community Based Organisations

16 CBOs were established, one in each district, from delegates from each CMC and led by the District Inspector, with support from a Business and Finance Assistant. The CBOs have supported the CMCs with financial management, tool distribution, worker payments and enterprise support, and will provide a long term link between CMCs and the district and county authorities.

Coordination with Counties and Districts



Although CMCs fund and manage their VARs, local authorities can provide support and guidance, connections to other parties across the county, such as health and agriculture, and coordination when a community seeks to expand its VARs. LISA has involved local authorities in VAR selection, site visits,

monthly meetings and dispute resolution. All parties now have a role in long term VAR management and development.

Turnovers to CMC, District and County

VARs are constructed by LISA, but their future is with others. As VARs are completed, the ownership and responsibility of each is turned over to, in turn, the CMC, the District and the County. Each step is recorded through agreement and certificate, ensuring that a long term future is not only assured

but is also part of local development plans and strategies.



Feeder road improvements

Most VAR users wishing to reach markets and other facilities outside their communities, are reliant on the condition of connecting feeder roads. Twelve such feeder roads have been improved with spot improvements, of total length 13.5 km, so that VAR users are more able to reach their destination.



Community enterprises

VARs will last for many years if funding is generated locally rather than sent from unreliable external sources. Motorcycle tolls and household contributions can help the funding but may not be enough, so LISA has helped CMCs set up commercial enterprises to provide additional income, and to better guarantee sufficient funds for maintenance work, and, if the opportunity arises, construction of new or extended VARs.



Leadership training

Leadership skills are required to guide a community through the changes that a VAR and its obligations might bring, whether beneficial or challenging in the short term. Training has been given in specific skills to those in leadership positions to improve communication, decision making, coordination, participation, accountability, teamworking and inclusion.

Agricultural training

Although VARs are used for many purposes, the key objective is to allow agricultural surpluses to be carried to market. Field based training has been given to 1600 farmers across every VAR community, with lead or senior farmers taking a central role, and with the objectives of increasing productivity, promoting sustainable farming methods, and raising awareness of regulations such as EUDR.



Coordination with agriculture projects

Two Sida-funded agriculture projects – Grow-2 and VOSIEDA – have operated in the same districts as LISA. A proportion of the VARs constructed by LISA provide access to sites of these projects. This coordination has shown the benefits of targeted VARs, as well as the need to maintain good communication through the implementation process from planning to maintenance.

Gender inclusion

Changes in a community can exclude marginalized groups and individuals. A gender analysis was carried out in the VAR communities and inclusion measures planned and implemented, including raising awareness of equality and shared benefits across the community, making procedures understandable by all, and integrating men and women into similar roles. A short impact study was

carried out during late August to assess the initial impact of these measures.



Closing event

A closing event was held at Cuttington University in Bong County on the 5th of August, before the departure of Monrovia-based Sida staff. This event gave the opportunity to all LISA stakeholders to hear from MPW Ministers, Sida officials, LISA staff, County Superintendents, District officials and members of CMCs and CBOs.



Certificates were awarded to Superintendents in recognition of the VAR county turnovers, the inclusion of VARs in next year's national budget was announced, and the importance of collaboration between all stakeholders as the VAR programme moves towards mainstreaming was stressed.

Lesson learned workshop

On the last day of project activities, the 31st of August, a workshop brought together MPW, TA and the TMCs. Lessons were discussed under three separate topics: social and technical aspects that would be used to revise the VAR manuals; and detailed data on the VARs, to be collated for

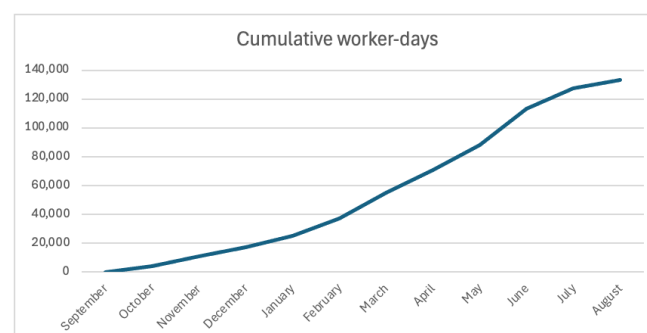


use by future VAR projects. One strong lesson was that many of the constraints on a single-year, externally funded project with a centralised management are unlikely to apply after VARs have been mainstreamed into a multi-year, national programme with management delegated to counties and districts and communities.



Worker-days

With work complete on all VARs, the cumulative number of worker-days has reached a total of 133,100 with just under half by female workers. This work has generated around \$665,000 for rural economies: two thirds of a million USD.



Full list of VARs

All VARs constructed or maintained under LISA can now be considered to be in good condition, under well-resourced and competent community management, and with district and county level oversight. The following lists bring together all VARs into the first national VAR network. (LSFRP *, LISA †)

Bong County

Salala District

Moipata-Buteisue †

Suakoko District

Nunetulamue-Tomkpolore †

Ballamah-Claymue †

Jorquelleh District

Whomgbeh-Dankpasue †

Zota District

Naamai-Jarkai †

Gbansuesulonmai-Boyanquelleh †

Panta District

Gbarnga Siaquelleh-Gbarsu *

Gbarnga Siaquelleh-Toquah *

Gbaita-Wumeh †

Foequelleh-Gbaita †

Foequelleh-Vayanhin †

Gbarnga Siaquelleh-Moses Village †

Gbarnga Siaquelleh-Gbaota †

Yealiquelleh District

Voloblai-Gbaito Ta †

Gwenikalay-Koliekaju †

Pleemue-Jorker †



Lofa County

Foya District

Sadu-Farmah †

Sadu-Sayma †

Fassapoe-Farm 1 †

Farmah-Farm 2 †

Farmah-Farm 3 †

Borliloe-Kolochoe †

Voinjama District

Lawalazu-Bazzie Village *

Lawalazu-Anglasu *

Lawalazu-Bitijama *

Lawalazu-Weazazue *

Samietta-Mumusu *

Samietta-Malita *

Vezela-Ballah †

Bazagizia-Zayea †

Jallamai-Kuyamai †

Lawalazu-Kpakacongozu †

Kolahun District

Fassavulu-Hilgbelahun †

Fassavulu-Mowulahun-Taninahun †

Fassavulu – George Village †

Zorzor District

Workesu Town-Bortema *

Workesu Town-Newenzu *

Borkesa-Kortewoloma *

Borkesa-Gbamawu *

Borkesa-Tuluwu *

Borkesa-Kpawolozu Village *

Borkesa-Gboguta-Veessayeazu-Zawenta *

Kpassagizia-Giziwulu Village *

Kpassagizia-Subahwolota *

Zelemmai-Kpannazu †

Zelemmai-Popowuzu †

Zelemmai-Zeawutu †

Kpassagizia-Dorlorzu †

Quardu Bondi District

Sarmadu-Wobazu *

Sarmadu-Wanganedu *

Barkedu-Beawu *

Barkedu-Duana-Boakai *

Barkedu-Bambala *

Salayea District

Zolowo Town-Beawu *



Nimba County

Gbehlay-Geh District

Zortapa-Neupea Johnson-Prince Karden *
 Zualay-Elijah & Joe Village *
 Zualay-Gbonogai *
 Kpolay-Kweezuluyepea *
 Dulay-Numapea *
 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 †
 Sehyi Gueh-Josephus Gbato †
 Sehyi 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 †

Zoe Gbao District

Zaglay-Voaplay †
 Zehplay-Gotuo †
 Zehplay-Clepea †

Troupoe-Fredrick †
 Troupoe-Pa Moses †
 Duowine-Gbopoa †

Bain Garr District

Whynor-Jefferson Wuol †
 Whynor-Kamawee Village †
 Whynor-Alphonso Canada †
 Yelekorlee-Fongowee †
 Yelekorlee-Zoku Village †
 Tundi-Payepea †
 Tundi -Zumba †

Doe District

Zuaplay-Bobpea *
 Zuaplay-Benpea *
 Zuaplay-Gehnpea *
 Zuaplay-Taryeapea *
 Keinpea – Manlor †
 Nuopea – Toepea †
 Nuopea - Barpea †

Kparblee District

Beatuo-Yarkpah *
 Beatuo-Tomahplay *
 Beatuo-Bobpea *
 Old Yourpea-Tuozon Kreh *
 Old Yourpea-Majoy *
 Old Yourpea-Israel *
 Old Yourpea-Gbar Village *
 Old Yourpea-Gbanwea *
 Behwalay-Seublelee *
 Behwalay-Yanteeblee *
 Dubuzon-Gaylablee *

Boe & Quilla District

Towah Town-Gbonpea *
 Baryeepea-Bonglay *
 Sarlay-Yepupea *
 Sarlay-Koopea *



Research

Research projects

VARs began life as the subject of a research study in Nimba County. Research has been central to the development and near-finalisation of the approach. LISA had a dedicated research budget, managed between Swansea University and LIDA-R. This budget was used for the following assignments:

RP1: Two weeks of training, in the three areas of community development, technical aspects and strategic planning, were given to MPW and TMC staff before work began.

RP2: Technical and management support was given to the M&E function within LISA throughout the project, focusing on the development of the logframe and the baseline and endline surveys.

RP3: The constraints relating to worker payments were assessed, and a hybrid payment system recommended: mobile money where reliable network exists; and cash payments elsewhere.



RP4: An impact study of LSFRP VARs was carried out, to complement the planned baseline/endline and final evaluations of LISA, and to benefit from a slightly longer time horizon for impacts to manifest.

RP5: An inappropriately selected VAR may lead to lost time, wasted resources and frustrated communities. The most appropriate selection criteria and methods are being researched.

RP6: Since motorcyclists will be main users of VARs, they are likely to have valid opinions on selection, design, funding and maintenance. Ways to involve motorcyclists are being assessed.

RP7: VAR maintenance can be carried out using voluntary or paid labour, and to a schedule by gangs

or in response to defects by lengthworkers. The various options are being assessed.



RP8: Several technical issues are being researched, including the use of a variety of timber species, the construction of bridge spans longer than 10 metres, and ways to prevent erosion during heavy rainfall.

RP9: VAR manuals, originally written in 2021, are being revised to enhance usability and to incorporate lessons learned during LISA, including those from the above research projects.



Case Study: Mao Community

Mao Town in Sanniquellie Mahn District, Nimba County has a population of over 1500. A feeder road to connect it and neighbouring towns to the national road network was constructed in 1956, rehabilitated in 2004 with funds from a local businessman, and then rehabilitated again in 2011 with funding from Sida.



The Mao-Jallah Quor VAR of around 2.6 km was completed by LISA in July. It connects several previously isolated villages and farms to Mao Town. Livelihoods are already changing in Mao Town and the surrounding area due to the safe, assured

and improved access to the farms, and then on to markets, health care and other facilities in Mao Town and beyond.

“before, during the rains like this, this place would get flooded and we would have to wait for two days to go to the farm, but now we don’t have to”

In February, during construction, a farming cooperative called Maoleseh cleared 30 acres of former farmland alongside the VAR, planted rice, beans, cassava and corn and had its first harvest in August. The cooperative, of 30 families and equal male/female membership, has been supported by the Sida-funded REALISE project and is following sustainable farming methods, such as crop rotation, mulching and integrated pest management, as learned from the LISA agricultural trainers.

In addition to the cooperative, 25 other families are expanding their farms alongside the VAR.



The people of Mao Town and those along the VAR are very grateful for the improved access and the skills and knowledge that they have gained. They are optimistic about the future and committed to the maintenance of the VAR, already with plans to extend it, providing long term and sustainable rural access to their farms and villages.



The chair of the cooperative says:

“Our first harvest of beans and corn was transported on motorbikes to the town, it would have taken days of headloading if we didn’t have the VAR”

Next steps

VARs have been completed and turned over to competent and resourced structures from community to county. A few steps remain to close the project, mentor the current VAR network, and take VARs from a project to a national programme.

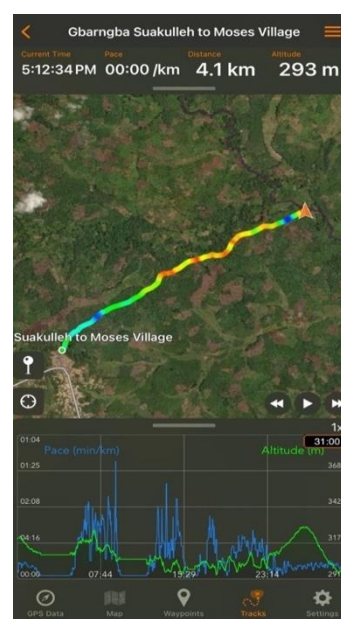
Brochure



Final reports are to be written but these tend to be dense and detailed. They can pass on a great deal of information but perhaps not inspire future partners or attract new staff. The LISA team is preparing a brochure that will explain, in a visual clear style how

VARs are planned and constructed and how they can trigger sustainable development.

Data collection



LISA’s inception was based on what was learned during LSFRP. In order for a future phase to be able to build on what LISA has achieved, it is important that all data, beyond that which is being collated by RP9 into the revised manuals – data such as labour seasonality and productivity, the most durable brands of handtool, availability of locally sourced materials, and

training, management and supervision costs – is recorded, stored and made available in a useful format. All parties are currently engaged in this data collection.

M&E – endline

A baseline survey was carried out and reported in late 2025. An endline survey will report in September and will identify the early impact of the LISA VARs, constrained by the time available to carry out post-construction proxy traffic counts on VARs not yet open to traffic.

M&E – final evaluation

In parallel to the endline survey, a final evaluation by an independent consultant will assess early impact but will also assess the design, planning and implementing of the LISA, as well as considering the coherence of the 2021 Totota pilot, LSFRP and LISA, and the steps required for VAR mainstreaming.



Final reports

A small project team is remaining after August in order to write the final narrative report and compile the final financial report, both for submission during November. With a likely gap until any future phase, it is important that all aspects of LISA are fully reported, to better inform those who will work on that phase and better prepare VARs for mainstreaming and national adoption.

Closing

After the final reports have been written and submitted, the few remaining members of the team will oversee a final audit, dispose of project assets such as cars and IT equipment, and complete all due payments.

Final newsletter

This is the final newsletter from the LISA project. All those who have had the privilege to work on the project thank the many readers for their interest.

CMC management of VARs

All CMCs are now managing their VARs, with the oversight of district and county administrations. For many, this work is starting during the annual heavy rains of August and September. As is often the case with earth roads, the carriageway and drains will consolidate and grass roots will strengthen the soil, so that future rains will be less damaging.



District and County supervision

Just as CMCs are adapting to their new responsibilities, so too are districts and counties adapting to theirs, with VARs featuring in site visits, district plans and county level infrastructure sector coordination meetings. Although VAR maintenance funds are generated within the community, monitoring and supervision will be incorporated into the main county M&E mechanism which is covered by county development funds.

Support from MPW

In addition to district and county oversight, MPW, through its county based Resident Engineers, who have been recently empowered within the MPW structure, will continue to monitor the network of VARs. Just as LISA took on the VARs from LSFRP, so too will a future project phase start from the now larger current VAR network.



Expansion



LSFRP and LISA have proved that VAR access can work. However, if the VAR network remains as listed above, these projects will have failed. The vision for VARs is that one VAR will trigger another nearby, whether with external funding or as a self-help internal initiative. As reported in

the May newsletter, this has already happened and is expected to continue, either within an individual community or between one with a VAR and a neighbour without.

Future opportunities

Ideally, a development programme sees one project or phase flow directly into the next, keeping the same agencies, staffing, knowledge and momentum. This flow was not possible either before or after LISA. The gap before LISA was of 13 months and was managed well. It is to be hoped that the coming gap will be both short and manageable, with as much continuity as possible and with minimal loss of momentum.

Final phase

The VAR model is close to what is needed for a national programme but some elements need further improvement and others need to be assessed before being fixed and standardised. It is important that the model and all its elements are ready before it is taken on by a national programme, and this is best achieved in one final externally supported phase.



Mainstreaming

Moving from an externally supported project to a national programme requires more than just a change of name. Among the elements that must be in place are assured funding, technical modules in tertiary education and vocational training, awareness within other Ministries and agencies that work in rural areas, legal backing, private sector competence and support, professional institutional backing, and environmental and social safeguarding standards. It is to give time to prepare and establish these elements that a final phase is required, after which VARs can be fully mainstreamed.

National network



One key feature of VARs is that after construction, the external costs are low. A growing feeder road network needs an annually increasing maintenance fund; a VAR network does not. It is reasonable to suggest that a VAR programme could progressively construct a VAR network of around 1,000 km per county. The limit is not the maintenance fund; it is the aspirations of

the rural communities.

Economic development

VARs can bring social and economic development, typically hand in hand, so that communities get access to social services just as they do to economic opportunities, with the latter helping to maintain and expand the local networks.

Upgrade to roads

Although a VAR can trigger economic development, it may not be sufficient. Farms may expand and opportunities arise such that cars, vans and trucks are needed. Where this happens, the VAR will have served its purpose well but the community management model may no longer be suitable. Government resources, in the short and long term, will be required, but the upgrade will be able to go

ahead with the confidence that the growth along the route will almost certainly justify the investment.

Challenges

The remaining challenges focus on the ambition of all parties for VARs to move from an externally supported project to a central component of national development policy.

Support current VARs



The VAR network, as listed above, was turned over to the management structure of CMCs, CBOs, districts and counties during the last weeks of LISA, in the middle of the rains. It is probable that some challenges will be faced, but

equally important that the nascent network survives so that communities can see the benefits. All parties involved in LISA, as far as they are able to, will support the VARs, whether remotely or on site.

Keep the idea alive

When a project is ongoing, discussions are held, progress is seen, and a presence is felt. Between projects, especially when the gap is indeterminate, discussion may quieten and the idea may go cold or be forgotten. It is incumbent on all parties to keep talking, thinking and planning, so that the idea stays alive, ready for reawakening.



Complete the process to mainstreaming

The elements required for mainstreaming are given above. A gap between phases might delay them a little, but it does make it important that all those

involved in VARs remember that a national programme is not far away and that these final steps must be taken as soon as the opportunity arises.



People of LISA

This newsletter has featured a series of individuals and groups who have shown the necessary qualities to make LISA and VARs a success.

However, now that work has finished, it is appropriate to highlight not just a noteworthy person or group, but to mention everyone who has contributed to the project.

Everyone in the groups, agencies, and teams below has given their all for LISA and the VARs, and should feel proud at what they have done and know that they have made a significant contribution to a better future for rural Liberia.

All those who have constructed the VARs
 All those who have maintained the VARs
 Members of all CMCs
 Members of all CBOs
 Other community leaders
 All those engaged in social enterprises
 District officials
 County officials
 TMC management and staff
 TA management and its Associate (LIDA)
 Swansea University and its Associate (LIDA-R)
 Independent evaluators
 The management and staff of Grow-2
 The management and staff of VOSIEDA
 MPW PMT
 MPW Ministers and officials
 Sida programme staff
 The Swedish Ambassador

Thanks are given to all

Highlights



County Introductory Meeting



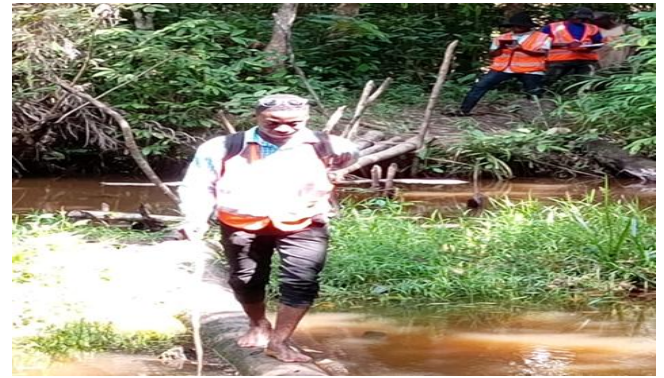
LISA Official Launch



TMCs social and technical training



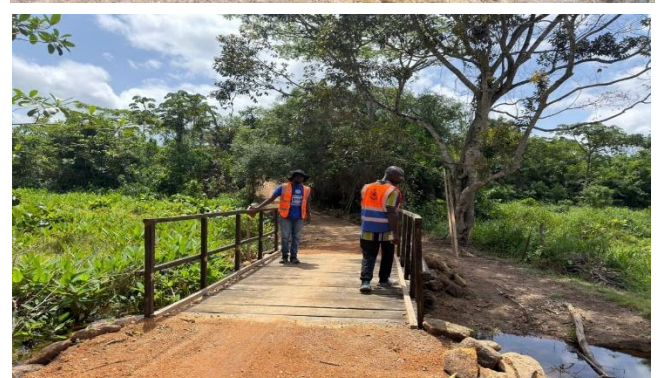
Establishment and Reactivation of CMCs and CBOs



Condition of village footpath before



VAR construction activities



VAR after construction



VAR Project Signboard