



1. Project Data

Project ID P155293	Project Name Social Safety Nets Project	
Country Liberia	Practice Area(Lead) Social Protection & Jobs	
L/C/TF Number(s) IDA-57910,TF-A6428,TF-B4346	Closing Date (Original) 31-Dec-2021	Total Project Cost (USD) 17,032,293.08
Bank Approval Date 28-Apr-2016	Closing Date (Actual) 30-Jun-2023	
	IBRD/IDA (USD)	Grants (USD)
Original Commitment	10,000,000.00	7,137,116.00
Revised Commitment	17,087,113.73	7,087,113.73
Actual	17,032,293.08	7,087,113.73

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2. Project Objectives and Components

a. Objectives

According to the Financing Agreement (Schedule 1, p. 4), and the Project Appraisal Document (PAD, p. 6), the Project Development Objective (PDO) was to "establish the key building blocks of a basic national safety net delivery system and provide income support to households who are both extremely poor and food insecure in the Republic of Liberia".

For the purpose of this ICRR, the project's PDO can be unpacked as follows:



Objective 1. Establish the key building blocks of a basic national safety net delivery system; and

Objective 2. Provide income support to households who are both extremely poor and food insecure.

During implementation, one associated outcome target was revised upward.

b. Were the project objectives/key associated outcome targets revised during implementation?

Yes

Did the Board approve the revised objectives/key associated outcome targets?

No

c. Will a split evaluation be undertaken?

No

d. Components

The project consisted of the following three components:

Component 1: Strengthening of the National Social Safety Net System (Total Cost: US\$5.7 million; International Development Association [IDA] Credit: US\$0.6 million; United States Agency for International Development [USAID] Grant: US\$5.1 million; Actual Total Cost: US\$3.66 million; IDA Credit: US\$0.36 million; USAID Grant: US\$3.29 million). This component financed the development of a social registry (SR) which included data as well as Management Information Systems (MIS) functions. It aimed to support (a) the development of a database architecture to house the SR, providing a single point for all social protection (SP) programs to access information about households and their vulnerabilities; (b) data collection and household registration; and (c) an eligibility screening mechanism to assess the poverty and food insecurity conditions of households. It also financed an integrated MIS for the social cash transfer (SCT) program that enables monitoring across participating programs as well as program-specific management modules for enrolment, payment, grievance redress, monitoring and evaluation (M&E), access management, and setting control.

Component 2: Cash Transfers to Extremely Poor and Food Insecure Households (Total Cost: US\$8.1 million; IDA Credit: US\$8.1 million; Actual Total Cost: US\$9.04 million; IDA Credit: US\$6.34 million; Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office [FCDO] Grant: US\$2.70 million). Building on previous experience, this component funded income support to about 10,000 extremely poor and food-insecure households in Bomi, Maryland, Grand Kru, and River Gee Counties through regular cash transfers. It also planned to finance the implementation of accompanying measures aimed at sensitizing beneficiary households to the project's objectives. In addition, the additional measures included raising the awareness of beneficiaries to adopt healthy nutritional practices as well as livelihood enhancing activities through educational workshops on (a) cultivating home gardens, and (b) increasing the food diversity and nutritional content in diets, particularly among children under five years of age.

Component 3: Project Management and Capacity Building (Total Cost: US\$2.0 million; IDA Credit: US\$1.3 million; USAID Grant: US\$0.7 million; Actual Total Cost: US\$4.03 million; IDA Credit: US\$2.93 million; USAID Grant: US\$0.30 million; FCDO Grant: US\$0.80 million). This component was designed to finance project management of the Liberia Social Safety Nets Project (LSSNP), including the



procurement of service providers to implement the operational aspect of the SR and SCT programs. It also supported capacity building to key stakeholders involved in implementation at the central and local government levels. Finally, it aimed to strengthen coordination across relevant ministries and stakeholders, including providing relevant support to national, county, and district-level committees as part of implementation.

The SCT was implemented in two phases: SCT Phase 1 in rural areas before the COVID-19 pandemic; and SCT Phase 2 in rural areas after the pandemic as well as SCT-COVID in urban areas.

The LSSNP was restructured six times, including four times to extend the closing date of the USAID Trust Fund. Furthermore, the project underwent one Level 2 restructuring (which was also an Additional Financing) to extend the project closing date from 31 December 2021 to 30 June 2023. The changes were introduced to reflect (i) closing date extensions of project financing (ICR, pp. 60-61); (ii) changes to project components (e.g., introduction of the SCT-COVID assistance and expansion of SCT coverage) and related PDIs during the third and fifth restructurings (ICR, pp. 46-47); and (iii) replacing of accompanying measures on nutrition and home gardening with basic financial planning exercise (to alleviate operational complexity).

Following is a summary of the six restructurings:

1. In July 2019, the project was extended to allow continued utilization of the USAID Trust Fund.
2. In July 2020, the USAID funding was extended to take into account delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. In November 2020, Additional Financing was provided to ensure that cash transfers and accompanying measures were provided over an adequate duration of a minimum of two years to extremely poor households. As a result, the Results Framework was updated, the project's components were modified and a reallocation between disbursement categories took place.
4. In June 2021, the closing date of the USAID Trust Fund was extended due to delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and low implementation capacity.
5. In April 2022, the project was adjusted due to the reduction in FCDO's co-financing.
6. In December 2022, another extension of the USAID funding was provided to allow two additional months to finalize SR data collection and for the PIU to perform quality reviews of the incoming data.

e. Comments on Project Cost, Financing, Borrower Contribution, and Dates

The project was co-financed by a US\$ 10 million International Development Association (IDA) credit (IDA-57910) and US\$7.1 million in grants from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)



and the FCDO. The initial FCDO commitment was approximately US\$8.8 million (GBP 7,006,250) (ICR, p. 6) of which around US\$5.3 million were cancelled in April 2022 (ICR, p.17).

The project was approved in April 2016 and became effective in September 2017. The delay of almost 1.5 years was due to minimal decision-making prior to elections and changes in government administration (ICR, p. 17).

The different financing sources' closing dates were extended on several occasions. The Bank financing was extended in the AF/third restructuring for a total of 1.5 years, from December 31, 2021, to June 30, 2023.

3. Relevance of Objectives

Rationale

The project was fully aligned with the Government of Liberia (GoL) and the Bank's strategies both at entry and at project closing. Furthermore, it was highly relevant since it addressed the needs of the population and was adaptable since it was able to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

The project was aligned with the GoL strategies and sectoral policies. At the time of appraisal, the project was aligned with Liberia's national vision, Liberia Rising 2030, and the accompanying five-year development strategy, the Agenda for Transformation (AfT), to promote its development goals. Specifically, the project was in line with AfT's Human Development pillar, which identified social protection (SP) as a key aspect to address vulnerability and reduce poverty. In addition, the LSSNP was aligned with the National Social Protection Policy and Strategy (2012–2017) (PAD, p. 2). Furthermore, the project maintained its alignment with the GoL's medium-term development plan, the Pro-poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development (PAPD) (2019–2023). In particular, the project contributed to the priorities highlighted under the PAPD's Pillar 1 (Power to the People) which included the following (i) empowering women and girls; (ii) ensuring SP for all, (iii) expanding access to health care, (iv) reducing vulnerability, and (v) mitigating socioeconomic disparities (ICR, p. 9).

At closing, objectives remained fully aligned with the World Bank Group's FY19-FY24 Country Partnership Framework (CPF). Specifically, it responded to the CPF's Pillar 2 (Building Human Capital to Seize New Economic Opportunities) which highlighted the Bank's program to "include social protection activities designed to improve nutrition and educational outcomes and increase labor earnings among the poor." Furthermore, the CPF's Objective 5 (Improved Earnings Generation Opportunities for Youth and Women) mentioned the LSSNP specifically, emphasizing it as a priority to help empower women, among others, through the provision of cash transfers to women who are heads of household or who are responsible for household management. Finally, the project contributed to the World Bank's global strategy of reducing absolute poverty and promoting shared prosperity. Globally, the project was also in line with the World Bank's Social Protection Strategy (2012–2022), which promoted the development of an SP system that is equitable, fiscally sustainable, responsive, and scalable. At the regional level the project was in line with the Bank's Africa Social Protection Strategy (2012–2022) which stressed the importance of strengthening public agencies to share resources more fairly and limit the damaging consequences of shocks (PAD, p. 5).



Finally, the LSSNP proved to be adaptable and was able to respond to the COVID-19 by expanding its targeting to urban areas and reaching vulnerable households affected by the pandemic.

Rating

High

4. Achievement of Objectives (Efficacy)

OBJECTIVE 1

Objective

Establish the key building blocks of a basic national safety net delivery system

Rationale

The **Theory of Change (ToC)** held that by (i) designing and developing a database to house the Social Registry (SR); (ii) collecting data and registering households (HH) into the SR; (iii) developing eligibility criteria to assess poverty and food insecurity at the HH level; then a SR with accurate information would be developed; would constitute the building block of an efficient Social Protection (SP) system; and would be used as the single point for all SP programs in Liberia.

The **ToC** also held that by developing a Management Information System (MIS) which includes HH data, modules for enrollment, payment, M&E, grievance redress, then an integrated MIS would be developed which would allow SP programs to deliver benefits.

Outputs and Intermediate Results

An intake tool used to enroll HH into the Liberia Household Social Registry (LHSR) was designed to capture the variables required to apply a proxy-means test (PMT) to estimate household consumption and to classify HHs as either extremely poor and food insecure or not (ICR, p. 10).

The project developed and operationalized a MIS which included two systems: the Social Registry Information System (SRIS) and the MIS. It also designed program-specific modules for enrolment, payment, grievance redress, M&E, access management, and settings control (ICR, p. 10). As a result, payment tracking records of all cash beneficiaries were logged into the MIS, thus exceeding the original target of 90 percent (ICR, p. 29). Furthermore, this allowed all grievance cases to be recorded into the MIS, thus exceeding the original target of 80 percent (ICR, p. 30). Importantly, and to complement the grievance redress mechanism (GRM), the project implemented Information, Education and Communication (IEC) to sensitize beneficiaries on payments before and during the implementation of the project. These campaigns were planned to ensure citizen-led monitoring of project implementation. In addition, the IEC informed beneficiaries on the use of the e-payment system, the security procedures put in place to prevent and deter fraud (for example, PIN code), and how to channel complaints regarding payments (PAD, p. 35). Additional



information on these campaigns, especially how they were implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic, would have been useful to include in the ICR.

Outcomes

As a result of the above outputs, the project established the first ever SR in the country - the Liberia Household Social Registry. In addition, the project met the original target of registering 67,000 HH and the revised target of 200,000 HH by successfully completing data records for 267,517 households from six counties (out of 15 in Liberia), covering around 20 percent of the total population (ICR, p. 9). Furthermore, as noted under Objective 2 below, almost 88 percent of payment delivery was timely, reflecting an important aspect of system effectiveness.

Finally, three SP programs utilized the SR, developed under the project, as an intake tool. They include (1) the SCT-COVID program, (2) the SCT-Phase 2, which incorporated the mobile short intake tool during beneficiary registration and leveraged LHSR data from Bomi and Maryland Counties for its geographical targeting, and (3) the Labor-Intensive Public Works (LIPW) program under the Recovery of Economic Activity for Liberian Informal Sector Employment Project (P174417) which also adopted the mobile short intake method (ICR, pp. 28-29). Moreover, and as documented in the fifth restructuring, with the closure of USAID grant in December 2022, the project was only able to conduct social registry data collection at most in three additional counties, instead of the original ambition to cover all counties. Lastly, the MIS is yet to serve other programs outside of those with Bank financing, notwithstanding the issuance of the cabinet endorsement in 2020 for the LHSR to be used as the primary tool for targeting SP programs (ICR, p. 10).

Rating

High

OBJECTIVE 2

Objective

Provide income support to households who are both extremely poor and food insecure

Rationale

The initial Theory of Change held that payment of cash transfers, preferably to a female HH member in the poorest and most food insecure countries and delivery of accompanying measures (e.g., nutrition awareness, home gardening, financial planning) would lead to provision of beneficiary HHs with opportunities to adopt healthy nutritional practices and livelihood-enhancing activities.

The ToC was later expanded under the SCT COVID phase which targeted urban neighborhoods and held that providing cash transfers to urban areas - that were vulnerable to the spread of COVID-19 due to high density, lack of access to services, and informality - would result in greater economic resilience of urban households (ICR, p. 9).

Note: In terms of long-term outcomes that were highlighted by the theory of change (reduced food insecurity, poverty and vulnerability, ICR, p. 4), remain dependent on several factors that are beyond the control of the operation.



Liberia was severely affected by the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) outbreak in 2014. As a result, gross domestic product (GDP) growth declined from 6.8 percent per year to 3 percent per year, leading to an income reduction of US\$200 million. In addition to worsening households' economic conditions, the EVD epidemic resulted in nearly half of the Liberian household heads who were working in the first half of 2014 reported being out of work by March 2015 (PAD, p. 1).

Furthermore, during the Ebola crisis, food security and child malnutrition worsened, with more than 90 percent of the households interviewed in the High Frequency Survey (December 2014) citing food insecurity as an issue (PAD, p. 2)

According to the PAD (p. 40), constraints to improved health and nutrition in Liberia include (a) lack of information on good nutrition practices; (b) poor access to nutritious foods, particularly during 'off-season' agricultural cycles; (c) competition between growing food for commercial markets and household consumption; and (d) cultural practices that negatively impact the variety of foods consumed and methods of preparation.

Outputs and Intermediate Results

Whereas the total number of households reached exceeded the target (see Outcome below), the total number of targeted beneficiaries did not. Of the 115,117 beneficiaries that the project aimed to target, 105,378 actually benefitted from the social safety net program. This is due to the average household size estimated at the time of project design being higher than the actual household size. Similarly, and for the same reasons, the sex-disaggregated targets were not achieved since the project benefitted around 42,000 women instead of the 57,588 that were intended to be reached.

The percentage of targeted beneficiaries receiving quarterly cash transfers was 98.62 percent, surpassing the target of 90.0 percent. Throughout the program's duration, this indicator consistently exceeded its target by approximately 1-5 percent.

Furthermore, the proportion of payments delivered on time was 87.85 percent, exceeding the target of 75 percent. Timeliness of payments improved over the project's implementation, reaching 100 percent by the project's closure. This is due to three reasons: (1) partnership with an experienced service provider; (2) transition to exclusively providing mobile money payments; and (3) supporting beneficiaries in setting up mobile-money accounts and providing them with mobile phones (ICR, p. 32). This indicator was also relevant to the first objective since it measured the effectiveness of the safety net delivery system.

The project succeeded in surpassing the target (40 percent of HHs) receiving the joint financial planning exercise by reaching more than 53 percent of HHs. This was a new indicator introduced during the fourth restructuring (April 2022), and therefore implemented only in the SCT Phase 2. The measure was introduced as part of a randomized impact evaluation embedded within the program. This indicator replaced two other indicators which meant to monitor the additional measures related to home-gardening and nutrition: (1) Share of cash transfer beneficiaries with at least one IEC session on home gardening; and (2) Share of cash transfer beneficiaries with at least one IEC session on nutrition. The ICR states that this change took place due to "operational complexity" in implementing the original additional measures without elaborating as to what was the reason for the complexity. According to the project team, the joint financial planning exercise was easier to implement because it was a one-time session whereas the accompanying measures related to nutrition would have had to be provided every time to cash payments were made. This shift in focus in



accompanying measures was introduced to address the low capacities and the delays that the project was facing.

Outcomes

According to the proxy-means test (PMT), around 85 percent of the households reached under SCT-Phase 1 and Phase 2 were extremely poor. However, there was a difference between Phase 1 which supported 3,451 households (HH) in two counties (Grand Kru and Maryland), 100 percent of which were extremely poor, and Phase 2 - which had universal enrolment - and resulted in reaching 7,203 HH, 78.4 percent of which were extremely poor (ICR, p. 26).

The project was able to exceed its target number of HH beneficiaries. This is partly due to the introduction of the emergency cash transfers in urban Montserrado as part of the COVID-19 response (known as SCT-COVID) during the third restructuring of the project and which reached 14,855 households in urban areas (constituting 58 percent of the total number of direct beneficiaries). **However, when this result was disaggregated by households with female cash recipient, the set target was not reached.** Women constituted 75.1 percent of cash recipients, falling just short of the target of 80 percent female cash recipients. It is important to note that there was a difference between rural areas and urban areas. The SCT-COVID emergency cash transfer program in urban areas had only 70.6 percent female cash recipients, bringing down the overall average for the project. Furthermore, the breakdown was adjusted in the AF/third restructuring to target a minimum percentage of female cash beneficiaries as opposed to female-headed households (FHH) (i.e., from an initial 80 percent of HH being FHH, to 80 percent of project beneficiaries being women).

In addition, the overall percentage of beneficiary HHs who were not facing severe food insecurity was 68.4 percent, surpassing the target of 60 percent. Whereas the overall share of respondents who were not facing severe food insecurity was 42 percent under SCT-Phase 1, it reached 81 percent under SCT-Phase 2. This outcome was measured through a PDM survey which was administered to a randomly sampled number of recipient households following each round of payments. The PDM survey included the Food Insecurity and Experience Scale (FIES) measure, which was used to track this indicator. The PDM asked respondents to self-report their access to food of sufficient quantity and quality, with a focus on a lack of money and resources to obtain food (ICR, p. 28).

Based on a random sample of beneficiary households who were surveyed, around 67 percent were classified as having acceptable food consumption, exceeding the target of 60 percent. The post distribution monitoring (PDM) survey captured various metrics, including the food consumption patterns of beneficiary households. This indicator was measured using the Food Consumption Score (FCS) which included information regarding the frequency of households' consumption of items across different food groups within a specified reference period. From these scores, households were then classified as having acceptable, borderline, or poor consumption. The ICR states that the average FCS score for the sampled beneficiaries improved, achieving 72 percent under SCT Phase 2. The ICR does not elaborate as to whether this improvement is real or whether it is due to the difference in poverty level between households targeted under SCT Phase 1 (100 percent extremely poor) and those under Phase 2 (78.4 percent extremely poor).

According to beneficiary satisfaction surveys which were administered after each round of payments to randomly selected 10 percent of recipient households, almost 95 percent of beneficiaries were



highly satisfied. This was corroborated by the qualitative data gathered over the program's duration which found that beneficiaries were highly satisfied with the program.

Finally, the ICR does not analyze the potential impact on the households' nutrition status due to the change in activities. However, based on the results of the impact assessment (which had not been finalized when the ICR was drafted), the project team noted that the couples that had participated in the joint financial planning exercise were able to improve management of their financial resources which contributed to improved nutritional status.

Rating

Substantial

OVERALL EFFICACY

Rationale

Objective 1 to establish the key building blocks of a basic national safety net delivery system was fully achieved and rated High. Objective 2 to provide income support to households who are both extremely poor and food insecure was almost fully achieved and rated Substantial. The project's overall efficacy rating is Substantial.

Overall Efficacy Rating

Substantial

5. Efficiency

A cost benefit analysis was not conducted by the project neither at the design stage nor as part of the ICR. Instead, the project's efficiency was assessed based on several factors: (1) number of poor households reached (outputs); (2) adequacy of amount of cash transferred; (3) operational costs; and (4) efficiency gains due to systems put in place, such as the MIS and the LHSR. However, efficiency gains accruing to the system and/or sector should not be confused with the efficiency of the project itself.

The ICR assumes perfect targeting (ICR, Footnote 31) and concludes that the project reached 36.1 percent of the total extremely poor households within the selected counties. However, a more realistic approach would be to assume imperfect targeting. Annex 4 of the ICR provides such estimates and provides a range of extreme poor households reached between 25.2 percent (assumption 70 percent accuracy) and 32.4 percent (assumption 90 percent accuracy). It is safe to assume that there were inclusion/exclusion errors – as is common in all social safety net programs – and that 100 percent accuracy is, therefore, not possible. Furthermore, the efficiency decreases if the number of individual beneficiaries (and not households) is



considered since, as indicated above, the project did not achieve its target in terms of individual beneficiaries reached.

The ICR includes the value of the cash transfer as a dimension of the project’s efficiency and mentions that it was adequate at the design stage; however, the adequacy fluctuated during implementation due to economic shifts, rising inflationary pressures, and the onset of COVID-19 (ICR, p. 12). However, the amount/value of the quarterly cash transfer would be more accurately linked to the project’s outcome (efficacy) since it would affect (i) the extent to which it was sufficient to cover the basic food needs of the targeted households; (ii) the extent to which its value was predictable which would allow households to better plan their consumption; and as a result, (iii) the level of beneficiary satisfaction.

Initially, the operating costs were high compared with similar projects in the Africa region (ICR, p. 41). With time, the project's efficiency improved and reached comparable cost-transfer ratios to other countries in the region during Phase 2 thanks to decreasing the number of transfers to only four quarters (instead of eight) but with the same total benefit amount as those in SCT Phase 1 (see ICR p. 6 and Table below). The ICR provides a comparison of the LSSNP’s operational costs with that of other social safety net programs in the region and concludes that they are comparable.

Administrative Cost (in %)	Administrative Cost/Beneficiary (US\$)	Administrative Cost of Delivering US\$1 of Transfer	
SCT-Phase 1	37	394	0.58
SCT-Phase 2	22	173	0.27
SCT-COVID	32	53	0.48
Total	28	133	0.40

Source: ICR, p. 43

Using more efficient cash transfer systems improved the project’s efficiency. The transition from cash-in-transit to exclusively providing mobile money payments led to (i) increased transparency, (ii) higher security of payment delivery, and (iii) improved timeliness of payments which increased from 14 percent to 87 percent once the service provider was brought on board (ICR, p. 13).

There were other aspects of implementation that significantly reduced efficiency, including the following:

Extensive operational delays slowed down the project, including, (1) effectiveness delays of 1.5 years (ICR, p. 17), (2) slow government decision-making in approvals, payment delays, recruitments, etc. (ICR, p. 18), and (3) implementation delays due to COVID-19, an exogenous factor and outside Government control (e.g., disruptions in the global supply chain delayed procurement, travel restrictions contributed to postponing LHSR data collection, challenges in delivering cash in transit to SCT beneficiaries, difficulty for the PIU to work/coordinate even virtually given network connectivity issues) (ICR, p. 17). As a result, the project was extended by 18 months (ICR, p. 13).

Decrease in financial resources led to a scaling down of activities. In 2020, and as part of the third restructuring, the FCDO’s grant financing allowed the SCT program to increase its reach to 12,500 extremely poor households in rural areas and introduced a temporary cash transfer to 15,000 households in Greater Monrovia under SCT-COVID. However, in May 2021, due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on its



economy, the British Government reduced its official development assistance, including the cancellation of US\$5.3 million for the project. This resulted in scaling down some of the activities under Components 2 and 3 (ICR, p. 17).

Insufficient human resource capacity decreased the project’s efficiency. Several key project positions (Financial Management Officer, Regional Coordinator, Operations Officer, and county level consultants) were vacant for multiple months by the MGCSP, presenting a significant bottleneck to project implementation. Furthermore, there was a high turnover of team members. This resulted in key procurement processes being late, responses to audit and other recommendations being delayed, and an overstretching of the PIU due an increase in the workload (ICR, p. 18). On the other hand, and as mentioned above, hiring an experienced service provider to deliver the SCT program improved efficiency by providing additional capacity to implement the project (ICR, p. 13).

Political transition delayed the project. During the 2017–2018 political transition, key members of the Project Implementation Unit (PIU) were replaced, both at managerial and technical levels. This led to a loss of institutional memory and slowed down implementation. In addition, with the new government, changes in the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection’s (MGCSP) were introduced which further delayed decision-making (ICR, p. 17).

Efficiency Rating

Modest

a. If available, enter the Economic Rate of Return (ERR) and/or Financial Rate of Return (FRR) at appraisal and the re-estimated value at evaluation:

	Rate Available?	Point value (%)	*Coverage/Scope (%)
Appraisal		0	0 <input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable
ICR Estimate		0	0 <input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable

* Refers to percent of total project cost for which ERR/FRR was calculated.

6. Outcome

The project’s overall rating is Moderately satisfactory. This rating is based on assessments of project relevance (high), efficacy (substantial) and efficiency (modest). The project was highly relevant and aligned to both the Government’s as well as partners’ - including the World Bank – priorities. It succeeded in achieving all of its five KOIs and six out of seven of its interim indicators. However, the achievements of KOIs and IRIs masks some important weaknesses, including not reaching the number of targeted individual beneficiaries, and the interruption in the implementation of the additional measures related to improving nutritional status of households. Finally, the project’s overall efficiency is modest, given that it experienced extensive delays, and



implementation costs were calculated based on number of households reached and not on number of individual beneficiaries.

a. **Outcome Rating**

Moderately Satisfactory

7. Risk to Development Outcome

The risk to development outcome is analyzed across the following dimensions: policy, institutional, organizational, technical capacity regarding the strengthening of a social safety net system.

At the policy level, the project did not envisage any activities to support the development of a social protection strategy. In addition, though the GoL's approval of a new medium-term National Social Protection Strategy had been included as a trigger for the Inclusive Growth Development Policy Operation (IGDPO), the strategy was delayed by the COVID-19 outbreak, and the policy action was subsequently dropped (ICR, p. 19).

Institutional sustainability was strengthened across two aspects. In January 2020, the Liberian cabinet endorsed the LHSR as the primary tool for targeting SP programs and ensured the sustainability of the LHSR (ICR, p. 10). In addition, the continuation of the National Social Safety Nets Secretariat guaranteed that coordination meetings at the policy and technical level as well as the updating process of the National SP Policy and Strategy would take place (ICR, p. 14).

Financial risk is substantial since the GoL has not yet approved a new National SP Policy and Strategy that includes an adequate level of financing in the national budget. Furthermore, Liberia's fiscal space remains limited for investment in the SP sector and excessive reliance on donor financing puts the sustainability of the country's SP system at risk (ICR, p. 23).

Organizational strengthening - through the development of operational tools – is the aspect that is most likely to achieve and sustain the development outcomes. The project developed several tools which are being used and expanded by other Bank-funded projects. These include the following: (1) **LHSR**, a consolidated database that allows the government to identify and target households in need of support; (2) the **MIS**, which includes modules for all key processes of the SR and implementation of SSN programs, including data collection, GRM, and M&E; (3) the **PMT** for better targeting; and (4) **mobile money** payments. These functionalities are currently being utilized and expanded under the REALISE project (ICR, p. 44). The Bank expects that the GoL will encourage their use for other programs after a more comprehensive utilization under the REALISE project (ICR, p. 10).

Insufficient capacity building of government staff further increases the risk to development outcomes. The project did not envisage from the start to train government staff outside the PIU. It was only at later stages of project implementation that more proactive efforts to expand the number of MGCSP staff included in capacity building activities to ensure ownership and continuity (ICR, p. 23).

Finally, whereas the ICR does not discuss the risk to development outcome at the household level in SCT Phase 2, the halting of the accompanying measures related to nutrition and home-gardening, likely increased the risk of households not adopting healthy nutritional practices. On the other hand,



the introduction of the couples' joint financial planning exercise, likely improved intra-household relations.

8. Assessment of Bank Performance

a. Quality-at-Entry

The project's design had some strong elements, in particular incorporating the lessons learnt from previous projects. These included the following: (i) strengthening community sensitization to ensure the targeting of the extreme poor; (ii) consulting with governmental and non-governmental organizations to ensure accurate transparent data collection; (iii) transferring cash payments on a quarterly instead of monthly basis to address the high cost of transfer; (iv) incrementally introducing information and communication technology (ICT) project implementation to allow for building the capacity to operate and maintain ICT processes (ICR, p. 16).

The project was prepared in coordination with other donors, in particular with USAID which participated in the joint appraisal to ensure complementarity of USAID's support to set up the SP delivery systems, such as the SR and MIS (ICR, p. 15).

The project's implementation arrangements included national level policy guidance and coordination as well as implementation and coordination structures at the decentralized level. The National Social Protection Steering Committee (SPSC) was headed by a national SP coordinator who headed the Project Implementation Unit (PIU). At the community level, the Community Social Protection Committees (CSPCs) were the key implementing agencies.

Though the PAD identified the potential risks appropriately, mitigation measures were effective for some, but not all, of the risks. For example, the macroeconomic risks, including limitations on the country's borrowing following approval, delayed significantly the project's effectiveness. This was due to (i) a program with the International Monetary Fund under which the country had to wait until a subsequent fiscal year to sign the Financing Agreement (in view of borrowing limits); and (b) the GoL having to reorganize its borrowing portfolio since there was already an active World Bank-financed operation in the portfolio (ICR, Footnote 34).

Similarly, the PAD identified inadequate institutional capacity and accountability mechanisms. To help mitigate these risks, preparation focused on providing technical assistance to implementing agencies to support implementation, investing in technical capacity-building activities, and relying upon in-country institutions (ICR, p. 16). However, the design could have considered from the outset the approach that was later adopted - intensive support from an experienced service provider.

Quality-at-Entry Rating
Satisfactory



b. Quality of supervision

The following elements were considered to have contributed to the quality of the Bank's supervision:

- **Regular implementation support missions** were conducted bi-annually (except in 2017 and 2020 when there were conducted once). These missions were held virtually during COVID-19 restrictions. Thirteen Implementation Status and Results Reports (ISRs) were produced and ISR ratings were adjusted to reflect challenges and progress in implementation.
- **Weekly meetings** to address technical, administrative, and fiduciary aspects of implementation. This allowed the provision of just-in-time and hands-on technical support to data management and analysis.
- **A midterm review (MTR)** was initiated virtually in mid-2021 and concluded in end-2021. It focused on continued implementation challenges and delays and new challenges: the authorizing environment at the MGCSP, liquidity constraints, and the adjustment in FCDO financing that resulted in a funding shortfall. Following the MTR, the fifth project restructuring was processed expeditiously to address these issues (ICR, p. 17).
- **Timely processing of six restructurings**, including an AF, expeditiously to address implementation issues and exogenous challenges.
- **Implementing innovative solutions as challenges arose.** The project team transitioned from cash in transit to mobile money payments to avoid delays in payments to beneficiaries due to weak capacity and unreliable cash-in-transit methods. Another example is the introduction of the couples' financing planning exercise during enrolment into the SCT program. However, the ICR does not elaborate on the operational complexity related to the additional measures (home-gardening and nutrition mentioned on page 7).
- **Intensive implementation support throughout the life of the project.** Given limited client capacity and the need to constantly play catch-up to achieve results, these efforts were often driven by the Bank team, including adjusting implementation schedules and implementation modalities and structuring the engagement with service providers. In the face of pressures to deliver timely and high-quality results under the project, the task team often had to lean into providing this intensive implementation support, financed largely by fundraising from TF resources, sometimes at the expense of much-needed capacity building (ICR, p. 25).
- **Support in implementing the process and impact evaluations for the two phases of the project.**

The Bank's continuous support to improve government capacity and innovate with service delivery arrangements helped bring implementation to a satisfactory conclusion (ICR, p. 17). As a result, though the project's implementation efficiency was lower initially, it recovered with intensive implementation support toward the final stages of implementation.



Quality of Supervision Rating

Satisfactory

Overall Bank Performance Rating

Satisfactory

9. M&E Design, Implementation, & Utilization

a. M&E Design

Since the project was approved in 2016, the PAD did not include a Theory of Change which became a requirement only as of 2017. Nevertheless, **the Results Framework and results indicators were closely aligned to the PDO and the underlying ToC.** Though a ToC and associated assumptions were not developed for the LSSNP, the PAD included a detailed Results Framework, with sex-disaggregated indicators, which allowed the ICR to re-construct a ToC.

Whereas the PDIs reasonably monitored outcomes (e.g., coverage, timeliness, satisfaction) as well as food consumption and food security), the PDO itself was limited to output-level objectives. The PDO could have been formulated in a way to capture outcome-level achievements. For example, to better monitor the PDO, it could have been formulated as follows: (i) “to establish *efficient and effective* key building blocks of a basic national safety net delivery system” which could have been monitored through the PDIs/IRIs related to an efficient/effective system (coverage, timeliness, satisfaction); and (ii) “to improve food security of extremely poor and food insecure households”, which could have been measured by the PDI/IRI related to food consumption and food security.

Originally, the project intended to integrate a customizable M&E module within the MIS, which would be utilized by the cash transfer program and will be accessible for other programs to incorporate in their M&E processes (PAD, p. 35). With the delays in developing the MIS, the MGSCP established M&E mechanisms for the project and the entire SP sector and hired a dedicated M&E officer (ICR, p. 19).

In addition, at the design stage, the project envisaged the implementation of two process evaluations to improve operational processes and support more effective SP coordination (PAD, p. 36) and to carry out post-distribution monitoring (PDM) after each round of payments. The process evaluations were meant to assess all the SCT and SR processes and determine whether they were being conducted as designed and to recommend any necessary improvements (PAD, pp. 35-36). The Bank team supported process and impact evaluation of SCT Phase 1 and Phase 2, respectively (ICR, p. 20).

b. M&E Implementation

The project had baseline information for all indicators (except one). After two years of project effectiveness, the PDM surveys were administered to 10 percent of recipient households who were randomly sampled and collected basic information on households’ circumstances and experiences under the program, which was used to track this indicator (ICR, p. 28). The PDMs were conducted by a private firm (Third Party Monitoring) to ensure that bias is minimized (ICR, p. 20). The ICR does not mention



whether there were challenges in administering the PDMs during the COVID-19 pandemic. The project conducted one process evaluation as well as an impact assessment.

The PDIs went through several revisions to fine-tune them (see Table below). During the AF/third restructuring, PDI 2 (share of cash transfer beneficiaries who eat at least one meal a day) was adjusted to “share of cash transfer beneficiary households who are not facing severe food insecurity” with a baseline of 24 percent. The original indicator was not well-defined for household-level measurement nor sufficiently reliable to measure changes over time. The revised indicator (FIES) is well-established and allows for measuring food security at the household level. Also, the breakdown of PDI 3 was adjusted to better track the gender of the cash transfer recipients rather than household heads who are often male. Further, the description of PDI 5 (share of project beneficiaries satisfied with project interventions, disaggregated by gender) was elaborated by specific aspects of beneficiary satisfaction being measured. In the third restructuring, the definition of PDI 1 was adjusted to clarify what constitutes a complete data record of households in the SR. (ICR, p. 6). The indicators for the additional measures were also adjusted to reflect the changes in activities implemented.

IR Indicator	Adjustments to Indicator Description/Definition
Proportion of payments delivered on time (Percentage)	Newly added in the third restructuring
Share of cash transfer beneficiaries with at least one IEC session on nutrition (Percentage)	Dropped in the fifth restructuring
Share of cash transfer beneficiaries with at least one IEC session on home gardening (Percentage)	Dropped in the fifth restructuring due to the discontinuation of the Home Gardening accompanying measures to alleviate operational complexity in the remaining project timeline
Share of cash transfer beneficiary households, from SCT Phase 2, receiving the joint-financial planning exercise (Percentage)	Newly added in the 5th restructuring to track implementation of the basic financial planning exercise for couples alongside their cash transfers
Cash transfer households with improved nutrition (Percentage)	Revised to “Share of cash transfer beneficiary households classified as having acceptable food consumption (Percentage)” in the third restructuring

Source: ICR, pp. 49-50.

The AF/third restructuring also adjusted the timeline for the end target to reflect the closing date extension and, for some indicators, the frequency and responsibility for data collection (ICR, Footnote 68, p. 49).

c. M&E Utilization

The M&E findings informed the MGSCP, project management and Bank staff throughout project implementation. M&E information was used in several ways:



1. Led to fine-tuning of the Results Framework indicators;
2. Informed the project restructurings, and other changes in the project, including those related to decrease in funding;
3. Guided adjustments to the project's implementation schedule. For example, given the delays in effectiveness and finalizing key contracts for the SR and MIS, the MGCSP adjusted the implementation plan to roll out cash transfers in some counties in parallel to the development of the LHSR, thereby ensuring that benefits reached the most vulnerable counties faster; and
4. Guided the design of the REALISE project which incorporated couples' financial planning exercise based on positive qualitative and quantitative feedback from SCT beneficiaries.

A payment landscape assessment fed directly into the transition of the SCT program to mobile money. Finally, the process evaluation led to adjustments of cash-out locations to ensure reasonable traveling distance by beneficiaries (p. 20).

M&E Quality Rating

Substantial

10. Other Issues

a. Safeguards

The project was classified as Environmental Assessment Category C and did not trigger any safeguard policies.

The project established a Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM) which was incorporated into the MIS. This is considered good practice since, in this case, the GRM would be part of the greater M&E system and not a standalone function. The GRM ensured accountability and addressed issues, among others, related to errors of inclusion/exclusion, payments, missing or stolen SIM cards, and fraudulent reporting of household information. The GRM was in place and functional during implementation, and the GRM module of the MIS was being used to record cases and their resolution. The PIU received grievances on alleged cases of sales of LHSR identification cards in certain communities in one county and conducted further investigation, although with some delays. The issue was resolved by project completion, and mitigation measures have been put in place to be applied under the REALISE project (ICR, p. 21). In addition, shortly before completion, the Bank received two Environmental and Social Incident Response Toolkit cases, one involving a stolen vehicle and the other a motorcycle accident. The Bank worked with the PIU to resolve both cases (ICR, p. 21).

b. Fiduciary Compliance

Procurement

To mitigate the high-risk rating at appraisal, the project put in place several mitigating measures including the recruitment of an international procurement specialist, producing a procurement manual, procurement



training and providing equipment (ICR, p. 21). Furthermore, Bank procurement staff in Liberia and Ghana country offices provided hands-on support on procurement and contract management including field visits (ICR, p 21). This regular support was essential in meeting the project targets. Nevertheless, the project faced several challenges including substantial delays in hiring the international procurement specialist, high staff turnover and an Integrity Vice Presidency (INT) investigation (ICR, p. 21).

Slow procurement affected especially two of the largest project contracts (data collection and MIS development) which were key to establish the social safety system. Furthermore, the INT investigation halted temporarily the procurement process which could be finalized once the investigation was completed. After long delays, the systems were contracted and contributed to the achievements of system building outcome (ICR, p. 21).

Financial Management

In terms of financial management, the ICR does not mention whether interim financial reports and annual project audit reports were submitted on a timely basis or whether they were found to be of acceptable standards. However, it states that there were financial management challenges related to (1) delays in the submission of an audit recommendation implementation plan; and (2) instances of ineligible expenditures which include an unauthorized transfer from the project account for US\$500,000, misuse of petty cash (US\$1,000), and USS\$10,800 related to the FM Officer short-listing report which were reimbursed expeditiously by the GoL (ICR, p. 22).

Finally, and similar to procurement, there were long periods where the Financial Manager Officer position was vacant between August 2019 and June 2021 ICR, p. 22).

c. Unintended impacts (Positive or Negative)

The ICR did not identify any unintended impacts.

d. Other

11. Ratings

Ratings	ICR	IEG	Reason for Disagreements/Comment
Outcome	Satisfactory	Moderately Satisfactory	This rating is based on assessments of project relevance (high), efficacy (substantial) and efficiency (modest). IEG agrees with the ICR on the ratings regarding relevance and efficacy; however, disagrees with the rating on efficiency given significant



			shortcomings, including extended delays that the project experienced.
Bank Performance	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	
Quality of M&E	High	Substantial	Moderate shortcomings in M&E design.
Quality of ICR	---	High	

12. Lessons

The ICRR confirms the series of lessons and recommendations emerging from the project’s experience (ICR, pp. 22-24) The ICRR summarizes the most relevant lessons below:

Maintaining a balance between hands-on implementation support and building the capacity of government staff entails a trade-off between efficiency and effectiveness. Whereas, there is a need to intensify implementation support during political transition periods in order not to slow down the project, it is equally important that the Bank’s team support does not replace the need to build the capacity of government staff. Improving efficiency should not take place at the expense of ensuring effectiveness and sustainability.

Adopting a holistic approach which includes policy dialogue as well as capacity building/training to accompany the technical aspects can ensure greater ownership and sustainability. Focusing on the technical aspect of building a SP system and on delivering the cash assistance is necessary; however, it is insufficient to ensure long term sustainability. Allocating a budget for institutionalizing the SP and for ensuring buy-in through communication, policy dialogue and training is key to improve ownership.

Having a flexible design, especially in Fragile, Conflict and Violence (FCV) contexts helps limit delays. The project’s design did not condition the disbursement under one component before the other. This allowed the project to deliver the cash assistance while building the SP systems.

Exogenous shocks can provide opportunities to pilot innovative approaches which could later be scaled up. The COVID-19 pandemic allowed the project to pilot two new aspects: (i) delivering cash assistance in urban areas which provided a “proof of concept” for universal targeting in urban areas; and (ii) using mobile means to deliver the assistance which was replicated in the second phase of the project in rural areas.

Removing potential access barriers facilitates the successful transition to mobile payment. Technical support (e.g., through the provision of mobile phones, assistance to obtain SIM cards, coordination with the mobile money operators, etc.) facilitated the introduction of mobile payments and ensured that beneficiaries had access to the service.

Additional Note: The ICR missed an opportunity to draw lessons regarding some important aspects of the project such as (1) implementation challenges in rural versus urban areas and how they were addressed; (2) the complexity in implementing the additional measures regarding nutrition and home-gardening and how they should be addressed in future similar operations; and (3) the



reason why other non-Bank funded social safety net programs did not utilize the MIS, notwithstanding the issuance of the cabinet endorsement in 2020 for the LHSR to be used as the primary tool for targeting SP programs (ICR, p. 10).

13. Assessment Recommended?

No

14. Comments on Quality of ICR

The ICR is generally well-written and provides a detailed overview of the project and available evidence support the ratings. It has also included a clearly reconstructed Theory of Change based on the project's Results Framework which, importantly, includes key assumptions. Furthermore, Annex 7 includes several tables which summarize concisely key information which makes the ICR both very concise and easier to follow. The ICR is also candid and mentions the various integrity and financial mismanagement issues that the project faced. The ICR uses evidence from the PDMs to support its analysis regarding the outcomes achieved regarding improvement in food consumption, decrease in food insecurity and overall beneficiary satisfaction. In addition, it is internally consistent and adheres to the ICR guidelines.

The ICR includes a good practice that of discussing the validity of the proxy-means test as a targeting tool. In Annex 4, it points out that the PMT is subject to error and discusses how coverage of the extreme poor may fluctuate given variations in targeting accuracy of the PMT.

Given the inclusion of urban beneficiaries to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, the ICR could have provided an analysis between the rural/urban differences in terms of targeting, implementation challenges faced and differences in project efficiency.

Finally, the GoL approved the draft ICR report with no additional comments or edits to be included into the report. For better planning of future similar social safety net programs, the government requested more technical engagements to better understand the efficiency rates reported in the Economic Analysis section (ICR, p. 45).

a. Quality of ICR Rating

High

