

**A Back-From-The-Field Report on the Main Data Collection Exercise of
the Core Welfare Indicators Questionnaire (CWIQ) Survey**

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Introduction

The more than a decade long civil strife in Liberia did not only destroy lives and properties but also created data gap – a key element in the planning and development process. The current government realizes the absence of accurate basic socioeconomic information that is needed for effective policy formulation and implementation.

In an initial response to the high economic recovery and development expectations of its citizenry, the government has prepared an Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy (iPRS). This medium term development framework is built on the Results Focus Transitional Framework (RFTF) and the 150 days deliverables¹ with the aim to reduce poverty through consolidating peace by strengthening national security, re-launching the economy, enhancing good governance and the rule of law and delivering infrastructure and basic social services to the down trodden masses. But the major constraint in preparing the iPRS which serves as a bridge to a full MDG-based poverty reduction strategy (PRS) is the lack of up-to-date information and statistics on current socio-economic conditions of the nation and its people. The questions of who are the poor, where are the poor and what are the coping mechanisms remained partially answered during the preparation of the iPRS.

To this end, the Government of Liberia and its development partners (UNDP, WB, DFID and EU), recognizing the need for both quantitative and qualitative data envisaged the conduct of the Core Welfare Indicators Questionnaire (CWIQ) survey. The CWIQ as it is conventionally known is an innovative concept designed by the Bretton Woods Institutions in collaboration with other development partners (UNDP, UNICEF and ILO) to rapidly monitor the effectiveness of the delivery of development programs and services to different population groups.

¹The RFTF is the policy document that guided and tracked the flow of donor funding pledged for Liberia in Washington in 2004 while the 150 days deliverables were the immediate actions earmarked by the Johnson-Sirleaf led government during its first 150 days in office. ²Dr. Toga Gayewea McIntosh

LISGIS is the arm of government that has the statutory mandate to set up an integrated statistical system to monitor the economic and social performances of the population. Against this background, LISGIS became the implementing party to Liberia's CWIQ survey – the first of its kind in the nation's history.

Objectives of the CWIQ Survey

The CWIQ seeks primarily to give needed estimate welfare levels and poverty incidence that will automatically serve as the baseline statistics to feed into Liberia's full MGD-based Poverty Reduction Strategy. The CWIQ which is accompanied by an income and expenditure module is geared towards achieving the following specifics:

- To gather data to produce poverty profile for the PRS;
- Collect data to augment the weights used for the CPI; and
- To build the statistical capacity of LISGIS to incorporate the CWIQ as an element of the Liberian PRS monitoring system.

This report therefore provides you with the coordinator's experience, having oversight responsibility over 4 teams (teams 5, 7, 10 and 12) assigned in Grand Bassa, Rivercess and Sinoe counties. It sets out the teams' achievements as well as constraints encountered during the process of the main data collection exercise of the CWIQ survey. The report is climaxed however, by a set of recommendations from the coordinator's perspective, gaining from the wealth of experience acquired from the field.

Constraints

The bad road conditions, damaged bridges coupled with the rain were the major constraints. These were often exacerbated by frequent breakdown in AVIS rented vehicles (see supervisors' vehicle log). Initially, the absence of operational funds to for both survey operations and maintenance of the vehicles posed serious challenge to the teams. The far distances of EAs that could not be reached by vehicles also impeded the work of interviewers who had to trudge 5-7 hours or risk their lives by riding unprotected canoes over rivers, something they have never done, to reach their respective designated EAs.

Crossing rivers to conduct interviews became very dangerous as this period saw the eventual wrecking of a canoe carrying Mr. Fallah M'bakillah (one of the interviewers of team 12), who was left abandoned in a river in Bluntsville, Sinoe County to save his own life. Mr. M'bakillah instantly lost his cell phone (Nokia 1110) and 2 copy each of the CWIQ and Income and Expenditure questionnaires during his struggle for survival in the river – a terrifying new world he had to face alone. This period also witnessed the disconnection of the spinal cord of Mrs. Roselyn Payjia, an interviewer of team 12 who was immediately admitted at the Sinoe County Medical Center in Greenville. The tragic event occurred when the car carrying team 12 bounced in a ditch on the highway. Mrs. Payjia was nevertheless evacuated to Monrovia where she sought medical care at the St. Joseph Catholic Hospital.

Another constraint which reduced the speed of the survey, discouraged fellow Supervisors and even led to the abandonment of one EA in Nana Kru, Sinoe County was the complete failure of Supervisor Robert Jallah to follow instructions from his Coordinator. Mr. Jallah acted on his own and in fact broke the chain of command by relating directly to the head office of LISGIS instead of his Coordinator - a gross disrespect and open defiance of authority. Mr. Jallah's assertions that Nana Kru was completely inaccessible and dangerous were mere fabrications built on his lack of commitment and unwillingness to travel far distances like his colleagues.

Achievements

A total of 24 enumerations areas (EAs) were selected in the 3 counties using the LDHS samples. 23 of these EAs were successfully completed by the teams (see supervisors' EA listings). There was also easy compliance on the part of selected households in these EAs. The receptive characteristic of the residents of the counties also gave impetus to the process. The speedy and successful arrangement with UNMIL Civil Affairs to have Mrs. Roselyn Payjia evacuated to Monrovia for immediate medical attention via UMIL air craft marked another milestone during our stay in Sinoe County.

Upon completion in the Southeast, the teams later joined their counterparts in Montserrado County where they successfully conducted interviews in 10 EAs, a process which accelerated the data collection exercise and thus, leaving the total EAs completed by the teams at 33.

Spots Checks

Frequent spot checks were conducted to ensure that field teams were in the region, selected EAs and performing their duties. There was constant communication with field supervisors and even interviewers to assess progress, solve problems and receive and forward completed questionnaires to LISGIS headquarters in Monrovia. Again, Supervisor Jallah could not be monitored, as his location at certain point in time was not divulged to the Coordinator for reasons that are yet to be revealed.

Conclusion

The 4 teams along with the Coordinator endured the numerous challenges and successfully completed the interviews in 33 EAs out of 34. LISGIS is however working

out modalities to have Supervisor Jallah and his interviewers air lifted to Nana Kru, Sinoe County, to complete the outstanding EA.

I want to quickly recognize the professional and experience effort of my driver, Mr. Anthony Morris who protected our lives as well as the vehicle through his careful and obedient driving. He maintained the vehicle through the jungles with not even a scratch - his tremendous contribution cannot be over emphasized.

Recommendation

I wish to recommend the following for future consideration by LISGIS authority:

- That surveys such as the CWIQ be conducted during the dry season;
- Sufficient publicity in the leeward counties should precede every survey;
- Rented vehicles be tested for sustainable road worthiness before they are hired;
- Immediate action should be taken to address complaints of Supervisors and Interviewers emanating from the field to avoid further distortion of surveys; and
- A prior knowledge to survey activities should be a compulsory pre-requisite for future survey recruitment.