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Cash for Work in Sierra Leone: A Case Study on the Design and Implementation of a Safety Net in Response to a Crisis

Colin Andrews, Mirey Ovadiya, Christophe Ribes Ros, and Quentin Wodon

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November 2012

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Abstract

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Keywords: public Works, social protection, cash for work, poverty, wage rate
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Acronyms

CEM  Coarse Exact Matching
CfWP  Cash for Work Program
COCs  Community Oversight Committees
CoPaD  Community Partnership for Development
CWIQ  Core Welfare Indicator Questionnaire
GAP  Gender Action Plan
GoSL  Government of Sierra Leone
HDI  Human Development Index
ICR  Implementation Completion Report
JEL  Journal of Economic Literature
MAFFS  Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security
MDAs  Ministries, Departments and Agencies
M&E  Monitoring and Evaluation
NaCSA  National Commission for Social Action
NSPA  National Social Protection Authority
PCRs  Project Completion Reports
SLIHS  Sierra Leone Integrated Household Survey
SLRA  Sierra Leone Roads Authority
SOCEP  Economic Opportunities Directorate
TFESSDTrust Fund for Environmentally & Socially Sustainable Development
YESP  Youth Employment and Skills Project
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Seven years after the end of the 10-year civil war, Sierra Leone continues to face serious human development challenges with more than 60% of its population living below the poverty line. Sierra Leone has very limited programs and resources to provide social assistance to its structural poor and does not yet have a coherent safety net system to allow a timely response in face of shocks. The recent global food price increases followed by the financial crisis brought to light once more a need for a flexible safety net program to protect the poor as Government’s ability to deliver basic services, and generate employment and incomes was severely constrained. With this realization, the Government of Sierra Leone, with support from the World Bank, set up a Cash for Work program in 2008 to primarily cushion the adverse impacts of the food price increases. The program was expanded throughout the country with an improved design in 2009 and then scaled up again in 2010 as a component of the IDA-supported Youth Employment Support Project (YESP).

In order to assess the performance of the cash for work program, the World Bank, in partnership with the National Commission for Social Action (NACSA), implemented a ‘assessment’ of the Cash for Work Project (CFWP) in 2009 during its first phase. The assessment comprised of quantitative and qualitative methods to assess the effectiveness of program implementation. This allowed feedback to program managers and policy makers and also overcame bottlenecks that would limit evaluation in crisis and low capacity contexts. Typically, a program sets out to establish robust evaluation processes comprising of impact evaluation and drawing on a programs Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) system. Since this was neither feasible nor appropriate in the crisis response, a light assessment proved the next best option.

Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected for this assessment, focusing especially on targeting, wage setting, project selection and direct and indirect benefits of the program such as gender empowerment and social cohesion. This paper presents a synthesis of the findings from the quantitative and qualitative data in order to analyze the context that led to the creation and implementation of the CFWP in Sierra Leone, the nature and administrative arrangements for the program, and its performance. The objective is to share the lessons learned from the assessment so that they can be useful for implementing similar programs in the future in Sierra Leone itself or in other countries.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 presents the overall context of the food crisis and the political economy setting through which the choice of scaling up a public works program prevailed. Section 3 outlines how the public works approach was tailored in the context of Sierra Leone as a labor intensive cash for work operation. Basic design features of the program are also highlighted. Section 4 discusses the implementation issues and program evolution focusing on poverty targeting, wage setting, project selection, program benefits, monitoring and evaluation, and social cohesion with respect to community, youth and gender empowerment. Section 5 summarizes the current outlook of the program, and proposes a number of lessons arising from the light assessment to inform future design and implementation of public works, and other social protection operations. The conclusion provides a series of considerations for responding to similar crises, taking into account broader lessons in other low-income, fragile states.
In summarizing design elements and feedback from program implementation, the paper draws on two previous World Bank analyses of the project. The first document is a quantitative assessment, which was based on a survey carried out from February to March 2010 (Backiny-Yetna and Wodon, 2012a). The quantitative assessment was primarily intended to analyze program results such as targeting performance, wage substitution effects and patterns of wage usage among participating households. The second document is a qualitative analysis, which included summary results from stakeholder interviews and focus group discussions held with both program participants and non-participants (Dalan Consulting, 2010).

**CHAPTER II: CONTEXT: FOOD PRICE CRISIS AND THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF A SOCIAL PROTECTION RESPONSE**

Given that the objective of the CfWP was to alleviate food insecurity in the context of the recent food, fuel, and financial crisis, it is important to discuss first the level of poverty in Sierra Leone in recent years. The latest available estimates of poverty on the basis of consumption data are based on the Sierra Leone Integrated Household Survey (SIHLS) of 2003-04. According to those estimates, 66.4% of the population is poor (47.0% in urban areas versus 78.6% in rural areas). Rural areas account for the largest proportion of the poor (73%, versus 61% of the population). Extreme poverty is defined as a household having a consumption level below what is needed to meet basic food needs. At the national level, 21% of the population is estimated to live in extreme poverty, with rural areas faring again much worse than urban areas and especially Freetown.

The poor and vulnerable in Sierra Leone face important risks. These risks relate to macroeconomic shocks, social instability, natural disasters and household level vulnerabilities. Sierra Leone is a fragile state and fares poorly in most indicators related to human development and the Millennium Development Goals. The country was ranked last in the latest Human Development Index (HDI) by the United Nations Development Program. Life expectancy at birth is reported at 47.8 years. Under 5 mortality was estimated at 192 per 1,000 live births and maternal mortality at 970 per 100,000 live births. The adult literacy rate according to HDI data is 40.9%, whilst the combined gross enrolment rate for primary, secondary and tertiary education is estimated at around 22.8%. The overall HDI value for Sierra Leone in 2005 is estimated at 0.336.

As a small economy strongly reliant on milled rice imports Sierra Leone is vulnerable to fluctuations in global commodity prices. Natural disasters, in particular floods, also constitute a recurrent risk of loss of livelihoods for subsistence farmers in the rural areas and poor urban populations. Although Sierra Leone is a relatively stable post-conflict country, the social tensions between the young and the old, different regions, urban and rural populations and ethnic groups can easily escalate.

Youth employment is a particularly pressing issue. Young people (ages 15 to 35) represent 34% of the population (Statistics Sierra Leone 2004). Today’s young people are transitioning from ex-combatants and victims of civil conflict to productive civilians in a peaceful society. It is estimated that by the age of 20–24 one in three urban youth and one in six rural youth is inactive in the labor market. While official estimates indicate that just 4% of Sierra Leoneans
are unemployed, the figure masks significant differences across age groups as well as under-employment—for example, one in five youth aged 20–24 is working fewer hours than s/he would like, and unpaid work in subsistence farming is common (Peeters et al, 2009). The president’s agenda for change puts underemployment among youth at 70% (Platt, 2009).

2.1. The 2008 Food Price Crisis and its Impact on Poverty

In 2008, against an already precarious backdrop, global food price increases reached crisis proportions: the average export price for rice, for example, increased from US$375/mt in January 2008 to US$775/mt by June 2008. The impact of high world food prices was compounded by the pass-through effects of higher fuel prices, which added to distribution costs, further fueling the rate of food price inflation across the world. International price volatility fed through quickly to consumer prices, most particularly in urban areas. The cost of imported rice in Freetown in December 2007 was 21% higher than in the preceding year while the June 2008 price was 53% higher than in the preceding year. Similarly, the price of wheat flour in December 2008 was twice that of a year earlier and the June 2008 price was 39% higher than in the preceding month of June (World Bank 2009). The impact of the increase in food prices on households was especially large because a substantial share of the rice consumed in Sierra Leone is imported, which means that producers may not have benefitted from the increase in the price of food staples as much as may have been the case in some other countries. Over the period immediately preceding the crisis, the country produced between 450,000 tons and 600,000 tons of rice, which represented a substantial improvement versus the conflict years. Nevertheless, rice imports continued to be important.

Simple techniques used to assess the impact of a change in the price of rice on poverty suggest that an increase in the price of rice by 50% would have led to an increase in the share of the population in poverty to 69.6% from the baseline of 66.4% - if only the potential impact of higher prices on consumers is taken into account. This is shown in table 1 which provides the results of the simulations with and without taking into account the potential positive impact on producers of higher price prices (in the later case, the impact is only slightly lower because much of the rice produced in the country is auto-consumed). While this may not seem to be a very large proportional change given an already poor population, it is substantial. Furthermore, the increase in the poverty gap which takes into account the distance separating the poor from the poverty line would have been much larger proportionately (Wodon et al., 2008).
Table 1: Potential Impact on Poverty of Higher Food Prices in Sierra Leone

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Share in Baseline poverty measure</th>
<th>Impact on Consumers only</th>
<th>Impact on Consumers Only</th>
<th>Impact on Consumers and producers</th>
<th>Impact on consumers &amp; producers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>66.4</td>
<td>67.8</td>
<td>69.6</td>
<td>67.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>48.6</td>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>48.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>78.6</td>
<td>79.9</td>
<td>81.0</td>
<td>79.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Headcount index

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Share in Baseline poverty measure</th>
<th>Impact on Consumers only</th>
<th>Impact on Consumers Only</th>
<th>Impact on Consumers and producers</th>
<th>Impact on consumers &amp; producers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>67.8</td>
<td>69.6</td>
<td>67.2</td>
<td>68.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>48.5</td>
<td>50.9</td>
<td>48.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>81.0</td>
<td>79.0</td>
<td>79.6</td>
<td>79.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Poverty gap

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Share in Baseline poverty measure</th>
<th>Impact on Consumers only</th>
<th>Impact on Consumers Only</th>
<th>Impact on Consumers and producers</th>
<th>Impact on consumers &amp; producers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>28.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>35.8</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>35.1</td>
<td>35.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Wodon et al. (2008)

The combined effect of food and fuel price increases not only created severe hardships for the population, but it also made it more difficult for the government to maintain the planned level of basic services to the population. The government was especially concerned about programs for education, health, social welfare, local councils, and security services. There was a need for urgent action, especially taking into account the population’s needs during June and December - traditionally known as the “hungry season”.

One of the measures taken by the Government included – as in most other African countries (see for example Wodon and Zaman, 2010) – reducing taxes on selected imported foods, and especially rice. In many countries, this measure could be shown to be fairly poorly targeted, as the majority of the rice consumed is purchased by relatively better off households. In the case of Sierra Leone, the jury is still out, in the sense that 32% of the rice consumed in the country is purchased by the bottom 40% as the poor. Similarly, about 54% of the rice consumed in the country is purchased by the bottom 60% of the population. Therefore, if cuts on imported taxes were indeed passed through by importers and distributors to consumers through lower market prices, the poor may have benefitted substantially from these tax cuts. Whether such tax cuts did indeed succeed in reducing consumer prices remains however open to question, as evidence for some other countries suggest that this may not always have been the case.

Beyond tax cuts, the Government considered a range of other measures to help protect the poor from the increase in food and fuel prices. This included a Cash for Works response given the fact that the impact of the increase in food- and fuel-related price was likely to be especially high among low income youths and female headed households.
2.2. Political Economy Factors Shaping Response

Before assessing the implementation experience of the Cash for Work Program, it is important to consider a number of political economy factors that shaped this choice of response, and will shape the overall debate for social protection in Sierra Leone. As the food crisis unfolded there was strong interest amongst Government and stakeholders on the possibility of mounting a social protection response, based both on existing activities within country, as well as experiences from other contexts.

Government’s primary objective was to shield the poor from price increases to the extent possible and ensure that social, economic and political pressures were managed. For this, it preferred a package of interventions with immediate and visible impact on household incomes and consumption smoothing effect. It was also important to identify measures which could be mounted quickly and would have urban and rural coverage. Quick consensus was built amongst policy makers and other stakeholders around the desirability and feasibility of a public works program: a safety net intervention which combined a cash transfer, temporary employment opportunities for large numbers of young people and rehabilitation of critical infrastructure that could improve access to markets and boost subsistence farming in the communities. This program was combined with fiscal measures which allowed the Government to absorb a large portion of the global price increases and reduce the impact on the market prices.

In addition, in the context of Sierra Leone, a public works program offered probably the only viable safety net response which could deliver rapid results in a challenging institutional environment whereby:

(i) Despite a large majority of the population being highly vulnerable to recurrent shocks, Sierra Leone lacks an effective social protection system and leadership of an institution. Although various sector ministries (agriculture, education, health, social welfare, youth, labor) oversee programs, there is not one agency which centralizes beneficiary information and creates linkages between programs;

(ii) The social protection field is very fragmented with small programs, scattered implementation. Collaboration amongst public sector agencies and development agencies implementing programs is weak;

(iii) Public sector capacity is inadequate to set up and implement programs in a short period of time. The Ministry of Social Welfare, which has the mandate to assist vulnerable groups, does not have the financial or physical capacity to serve its target population. For example, while small and marginal social assistance programs targeting the widows, orphans, disabled and elderly were in place at the time of the crisis, they were not supported by scalable targeting, enrollment, payment or monitoring mechanisms.

In such an environment, the option of working through an existing social fund mechanism through the National Commission for Social Action (NACSA) emerged. Relative to other interventions, a public works program was fairly straightforward to set up by relying on
NACSA\(^2\), an agency which had an extensive and capable field network with well trained staff and experience on construction of small community infrastructure. NACSA’s experience collaborating with local councils - accumulated in working with communities\(^3\) - also proved to be invaluable and a good entry.

**CHAPTER III: TAILORING A CASH FOR WORK RESPONSE TO SIERRA LEONE: BASIC DESIGN FEATURES**

Despite the time pressures created by the onset of the food price crisis and the weak national capacity for implementation, Sierra Leone was able to mount quickly a response in the form of the Cash for Work Program (See Box 1 for a descriptive overview on safety nets and public works). The CfWP was introduced in response to a formal request from the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, alongside a series of other aforementioned crisis response interventions. The project was a joint effort of the Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) and the World Bank, designed to provide short term employment and income for households hard-hit by rising food prices. By January 2010, the project had reached all 16,000 intended beneficiaries. A second phase of the program with an additional US$4 million was implemented in 2009-2010. Based on this early implementation experience, another project (the Youth Employment Support Project – YESP) which scaled up the CfWP was approved by the Board of the World Bank in June 2010. The third phase under the YESP will run from September 2010 to June 30, 2013.

Basic design features of the program included:

**Key Objectives:** The objective of the CfWP was to mitigate the impact of the food price increases in particular in the most “food insecure” areas of the country. The program aimed to provide temporary employment to 16,000 beneficiaries/households and create 849,000 person-days of employment in its first phase. The total cost of the first phase of the program was US$4 million. Work performed through the program also provided public services to Sierra Leonean communities, including by rehabilitating public agricultural land in rural areas and fixing rural feeder roads and roads in peri-urban areas, as well as drains, and public spaces in urban and rural areas.

**Institutional Arrangements:** The program was executed in a decentralized context involving the participation of a centralized semi-autonomous agency\(^4\), several ministries, district authorities and small independent contractors. Critically, the CfWP was designed to build on the existing

\(^2\) Following the war, the National Commission for Social Action (NACSA) gained prominence by implementing a large community driven development program. Later, its mandate was extended to take the lead in coordinating the elaboration of the social protection strategy. The Ministry of Finance in Sierra Leone has played a key role in overseeing large programs targeting communities and local councils, but in reality it has not yet taken a strategic approach to social protection policy. A National Social Protection Authority (NSPA)\(^2\) chaired by the President’s Chief of Staff and co-chaired by the Ministry of Finance was recently approved by Parliament. The new body is expected to make policy decisions on social protection programming and spending and have an oversight function

\(^3\) NACSA implemented a community driven development program-National Social Action Program- during the period of 2003-2008.

\(^4\) The National Commission for Social Action (NACSA) was created by a Parliament Act in 2001 however it has received largely external funding for its programming.
capacities and experience of the National Social Action Program which had been operating since the end of the civil war in 2003. The program, since its inception, has been managed by the National Commission for Social Action (NACSA) which has an overall mandate to coordinate social protection activities in Sierra Leone. NACSA has been the lead agency implementing a number of Government and externally funded community development and social protection programs targeting war affected and vulnerable populations. It is organized in a decentralized fashion with field offices throughout the country which establish direct contract with beneficiary communities and implementing partners in the field. Program implementation was overseen by NACSA field offices in partnership with several other actors. Local Councils, Sierra Leone Roads Authority (SLRA), and the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (as well as representatives of other relevant ministries or agencies) formed the local level works projects approval committee. Works projects were executed by “small contractors” which were qualifying private local contractors, artisans, or registered youth groups. The works were supervised by local teams consisting of NACSA field staff, SLRA, local councils and relevant ministry staff.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 1: Public Works and Safety Nets: An Overview</th>
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<tr>
<td>The case study focuses on safety net–oriented public works programs. These are social protection instruments used mainly in low- and middle-income countries in response to a variety of circumstances in order to create temporary jobs. They are typically financed and/or implemented by a federal or provincial government, or by a donor agency. The output of such programs is twofold: temporary jobs that provide wage income to participants; and the creation of public goods, including new infrastructure or improvement to existing infrastructure, soil conservation and land rehabilitation, or service delivery. Though all public works programs taking a safety net approach generate income for participants while creating assets, they are flexible program instruments that can respond to specific country situations by prioritizing program objectives and adjusting program design elements. Primary program objectives may be varied and include: (i) mitigation of shocks; (ii) poverty relief; (iii) a bridge to more permanent employment. The success of each program depends very much on its design features including: (i) the level of the wage rate is a critical design feature; in theory, self-selection can be encouraged if the wage paid by the public works program is set at slightly below the market wage for unskilled labor; and (ii) the overall share of labor costs is also critical. Public works as a safety net program put particular emphasis on selecting labor-intensive projects to maximize the number of people benefiting from wages. In other words, the program aims to implement projects with a high share of labor cost without compromising the quality of the assets created. These two design features in particular cut across many of the key discussions of this assessment. For more details see Subbarao et al (2012).</td>
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**Targeting:** A combination of targeting mechanisms was foreseen in program implementation. Initially, program resources were allocated to seven districts of the country based on poverty and food insecurity prevalence rates and population ranking. At the district level, beneficiary

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5 The Parliament extended NACSA’s mandate until 2018, and expanded it to include support for local development/local councils and social assistance programs for the poor, and for the war reparations effort.

6 In its second phase and subsequent phases, the program expanded to cover all regions.

7 As defined per the 2008 Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Assessment (CFSVA) by the WFP/FAO. This was measured largely by household food production and consumption patterns.
communities that would receive the works projects were identified jointly by NACSA and local councils based on: (a) the viability of the project proposals put forward; and (b) the relative needs of the communities. At the community level, beneficiary selection was to be determined by: (a) self-targeting—individuals who would be willing to work for the program wage rate and (b) the stipulation that 30% of all workers be female. Each beneficiary was entitled to work for a maximum of 50 days and/or the duration of the project not to exceed two months. Workers were to be selected from within the locality, and only one member from each household was eligible to participate in the program. In the case of more potential participants than needed for each project, the contractor was to utilize a transparent mechanism to select participants either on a first-come-first-serve basis or a lottery.

**Wage Rate:** A widely practiced design principle in public works programs is the application of a below market wage rate to ensure self-selection of the neediest into the program. The understanding is that an individual who has other alternatives for employment will not be attracted by the nature of the work and low wages. The program used a wage band of 6,000-7,500 Leones per day depending on the prevailing regional wages in the country. The wage rates used under the CfWP were calculated to be significantly under the prevailing market rate that was found in the area (with a discount around 30% in most cases). In certain areas, such as Freetown Western Area the wage rate offered by the CfWP was in this case at 50% or less of the market rate. The number of hours worked varied among the districts, but in general tended to be between 6 and 8 hours per day.

**Project Selection:** The works menu included sub-projects that could provide employment to large numbers of people and help improve the livelihood of beneficiaries. The eligible works menu consisted of: (i) rural feeder road rehabilitation; (ii) inland valley swamp (IVS) rice cultivation; (iii) other agriculture projects (alternative crop cultivation); and (iv) environment (reforestation, terracing and other soil conservation activities) projects. The labor content of the works projects needed to be above 60%, so that the projects could enable a high share of temporary jobs creation. Roads rehabilitation projects were often favored because they had the potential to absorb large numbers of beneficiaries at once and were seen as critical for communities to access markets and improve livelihood opportunities. The communities were asked to submit proposals for eligible works projects in their localities. Projects were selected by a committee consisting of local council members, NACSA local representative and representatives of relevant sector ministries.

**CHAPTER IV: IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES AND EVOLUTION OF KEY PROGRAM FEATURES IN THE FRAGILE STATE CONTEXT**

We now turn to consider the evidence generated during the assessment to look at how the Cash for Work operation fared during implementation. In the following section we examine

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8 These districts were Western Rural, Freetown, Kono, Bombali, Moyamba, Bo and Port Loko. Although Freetown and Kono ranked lower in terms of overall food insecurity and vulnerability, they were chosen because of the presence of large concentrations of unemployed youth.

9 The implementation period that is reviewed in this paper covers the first phase of the Cash for Works of the Program-2008/9.
findings related to poverty targeting, wage setting, project selection, beneficiary perceptions and social cohesion priorities.

4.1. Poverty Targeting and Beneficiary Selection

Findings from a light assessment\(^{10}\) point to a disappointing targeting performance of the program, with high inclusion errors of non-poor population quintiles. The findings seem counter-intuitive to what one might expect ex-ante, given the incorporation of international best practice approaches around mixed targeting methods i.e. geographic targeting at the district level and self-targeting at the beneficiary level. Evidence and findings on these issues are now considered.

The targeting performance of the program was estimated ex-post using as assessment survey questionnaire fielded in Sierra Leone at the end of 2009 by Backiny-Yetna and Wodon (2012a) supplemented by a qualitative program assessment\(^{11}\). A random sample of beneficiaries from CfWP was drawn from most of the regions in which the program is implemented (at the time the survey was fielded, not all regions had completed their implementation of the program, which explains why the sample is not fully representative). Approximately 1,000 participants were interviewed. Targeting performance was estimated by matching the characteristics of CfWP participants (i.e. welfare status) with the national population as represented by the 2007 Core Welfare Indicator Questionnaire (CWIQ) and the 2003-4 Sierra Leone Integrated Household Survey (SLIHS).

Different methods were used by Backiny-Yetna and Wodon (2012a) for assessing where the beneficiaries of the CfWP were situated in the distribution of welfare of the country. Comparisons were made in terms of assets indices between beneficiaries and the overall population, as well as in terms of consumption per equivalent adult. In addition, two different techniques were used for the analysis – with or without so-called coarse exact matching (CEM) as a first step before matching households through more standard techniques. The main results are provided in table 2, with a comparison with similar results obtained for the assessment of a very similar cash for work project in Liberia which was evaluated at the same time as the Sierra Leone project and using the same approach (see Backiny-Yetna et al., 2012b). Overall, the results were robust to the choice of methodology for assessing targeting performance.

The results presented in table 2 suggest that many of the 2008-09 CfWP households belonged to the higher quintiles of wealth, with 21.0% located in the third quintile, 44.1% in the fourth, and 15.1% in the top quintile of welfare. It must be emphasized that even households in the fourth quintile in Sierra Leone could be considered as poor, or at least as highly vulnerable to poverty, given that the simulations presented in table 1 suggest that about 70% of the population could have been considered as poor given the increase in food prices. Thus, the program did reach households in need. Yet at the same time table 2 also presents the results for Liberia, where the similarly designed CfWP apparently better reached households in the

\(^{10}\) Light assessment refers to use of a short survey targeted to a random sample of CfW program beneficiaries and comparing/matching the results of this survey with the available national household survey data.

\(^{11}\) Qualitative Assessment of the Sierra Leone Cash for Works program, Dalan Consulting, 2010.
lower quintiles of welfare than was the case for Sierra Leone. Clearly, even if the 2008-09 Sierra Leone CfWP did provide much needed relief to populations in need, its targeting performance was weaker than it could have been.

**Table 2: Targeting Performance - Share of Project Beneficiaries by Welfare Quintile (%)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sierra Leone (First phase (2008-09))</th>
<th>Comparison: Liberia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poorest quintile</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second quintile</td>
<td>14.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>43.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third quintile</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth quintile</td>
<td>44.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richest quintile</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Backiny-Yetna and Wodon (2012a), Backiny-Yetna et al. (2012b)

What might account for the relatively poor targeting performance of the program in Sierra Leone? It is difficult with the quantitative data alone to identify what led to weak targeting, but drawing also on the qualitative assessment findings a number of factors could account be considered.

**Geographic Targeting Factors:** As a rapidly implemented emergency operation operating in a low-data environment, the 2008-09 CfW program struggled to apply strict poverty/need based geographic targeting criteria at the lowest administrative level possible closest to the beneficiary. At the district level\(^{12}\), the program was successful in allocating resources based on poverty and food insecurity prevalence rates and population ranking. Going down to sub-district and community\(^{13}\) level the program adopted a more opportunistic approach due to lack of data at these levels. As per operational guidelines, beneficiary communities were identified by NACSA and local councils based on: (a) the viability of the project proposals put forward; and (b) the relative needs of the communities. The first criteria on ‘project viability’ proved to be critical in many cases. Communities were selected on the basis of relevance of the public works activity that they were proposing, rather than on the relative exposure of these communities to food insecurity or poverty: in particular, one of the main criteria for selection was that priority would be given to projects that had already been identified and captured in the District Council Development plans. Given the emergency nature of the first phase of the program, this implied that about 70% of communities\(^{14}\) were selected based on an ability to quickly implement “off-the-shelf” road rehabilitation/maintenance projects in localities. The fact that the selection of the communities was in such a manner and not based primarily on poverty/vulnerability criteria undoubtedly weakened the ability of the program to reach the poorest, such that the project has attracted less poor beneficiaries living closer to city centers and markets.

A further complication of geographic targeting relates to the distribution of poor populations. Geographic targeting is appropriate where the poor or the affected (from a flood, drought or

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\(^{12}\) There are 14 districts in Sierra Leone. Their population ranges between approximately 140,000 to 800,000 the largest being Western Urban which includes Freetown.

\(^{13}\) Each district on average has 15-17 towns and villages.

\(^{14}\) Authors’ estimation based on the sub-project administrative database
other) are disproportionately concentrated in one area. However, in places where pockets of poverty or vulnerability co-exist with relatively well-off populations, geographic targeting needs to be combined with other methods that make use of poverty data. Although the program design emphasized the use of multiple targeting methods to make identification of the neediest more accurate and comprehensive, thereby improving targeting\textsuperscript{15}, the intra-district targeting to be based on relative poverty and need was not well implemented and applied. The geographic targeting approach has been revamped under the Youth Employment Support Project, with a new data-driven geographic targeting model that permits more objective targeting at the sub-district level.

**Self Targeting:** Self-targeting also posed challenges for the program, and brings into focus the efficacy of two particular design attributes (i) wage rates and (ii) work requirement. The program’s targeting at the beneficiary level relied heavily on self-targeting through below market wage rates, which were meant to dissuade participation by people in upper income quintiles and those who already had productive employment. Despite what appeared to be a low wage setting approach, the program seemed to attract high numbers of relatively better off beneficiaries and was often oversubscribed\textsuperscript{16}.

Findings from the assessments are inconclusive on this front, and require further scrutiny as the program evolves. Assuming the full six-to-eight hour work requirement was enforced (which seems likely from the qualitative assessment), we see higher than anticipated inclusion errors. This raises a number of possibilities. Firstly, it suggests the limitations of using wage levels alone working in high poverty and high unemployment contexts. This brings into focus whether a lower wage level should be set. Although concessionary wage levels are higher than the program wage, those jobs are not widely available, and perhaps a truer benchmark in wage setting is to look at the casual labor market wage rates. We return to this issue in the following section. Second, it suggests a need for additional targeting mechanisms at community level to ensure places in the program were well rationed. For example, in Liberia by contrast – where as already mentioned a similar study was conducted (see Bacin-Yetna et al., 2012b, as well as Andrews et al., 2011) - the jobs were allocated in most cases on a first-come, first-served basis, which may have prevented reaching the extreme poor, but seemed to be efficient in reaching the poor. In the context of Sierra Leone, the communities resorted to a rotation based approach (discussed below) which may have had opposite results.

If the full work requirement was not enforced, other possibilities could come into focus, i.e. beneficiaries could avail of a full day’s wage, without having to substitute away from other labor activities. This did not seem likely based on qualitative findings. Work sites were organized to include registration and muster roles that ensured projects were completed.

\textsuperscript{15} For more information see Coady, Grosh, and Hoddinott, 2004. In their review of 128 social assistance programs implemented in 48 countries, Coady, Grosh, and Hoddinott found that there was no clearly preferred targeting method. In fact, 80% of the variability in targeting performance was due to differences within targeting methods; only 20% was due to differences across methods.

\textsuperscript{16} The sub-project administrative data suggests that in 30% of the sub-projects rotation of beneficiaries was used which implies that the projects were oversubscribed. However, authors believe that based on manual record-keeping practices at the work-sites, interviews with beneficiaries during supervision visits and the qualitative assessment findings, this is an underestimation.
Monitoring activities suggest these control mechanisms worked well. Flexibility offered to combine public works with other (e.g. agriculture, petty trade) work may have attracted a larger pool of labor than initially anticipated. Regardless, the project design intended to supplement household incomes and not to replace them completely.

**Underlying dynamics of targeting performance:** Assessment findings, however, point to a number of underlying program dynamics which appeared to hamper overall targeting performance:

First, there was a lack of transparency on beneficiary selection in the 2008-09 phase: Beneficiary selection was facilitated in some cases by local authorities, in others by the contractors implementing the program (who did in some cases provide jobs to individuals external to the community), and still in other cases by local traditional chiefs/elders and/or youth leaders. Although contractors were never assigned a role in selecting participants in the original project design, there were complaints expressed by community members that they did play a role and did not always apply the eligibility criteria. For example, contractors were expected to enforce lottery or first-come first served mechanisms where oversubscription occurred. This did not seem to be the norm. Even though there were selection criteria applied during enrollment (i.e. the quota on women, one beneficiary per household, and being a resident of the locality), these criteria were not uniformly enforced or adhered. Findings suggest that as the program rolled out there was an emphasis placed in program implementation on targeting youths. This is particularly understandable given the physically demanding nature of projects selected for the program i.e. road maintenance and a concern that most local authorities had with respect to providing gainful employment to large numbers of unemployed youth. However, it may have had an unintended effect of skewing overall targeting performance. To address this problem, beneficiary selection under YESP has been turned over to local Community Oversight Committees (COCs).
Second, because of high demand for the CfWP, many communities introduced a rotation mechanism\textsuperscript{17} to enable more individuals to participate, albeit for a smaller number of days (this is documented in the qualitative assessment; see Dalan Development Consultants, 2010). At the works sites, although self-targeting and first–come, first-served were to be the main mechanisms to identify and enroll beneficiaries to the program, the overwhelming demand required additional measures. The program design called for a lottery mechanism to regulate excess demand. However, communities approached this proposal with skepticism and mistrust, noting its susceptibility to manipulation and favoritism and therefore did not use it in many instances. Instead, a rotation system emerged whereby all those who were willing to work were given an opportunity to participate in the program through weekly or bi-weekly rotations of works crews. The qualitative assessment established that community members viewed the rotation as a “fair system” which distributed the benefits of the program equally amongst the poor and the unemployed. The rotation system was an innovation that was coherent with the objective of giving opportunities to a larger group of youths. NACSA, the implementing agency, and the local councils agreed with the rotation arrangement as an important adjustment to the program design in line with the socio-economic dynamics and values of many poor

\textsuperscript{17} Based on a sub-project administrative database, it is estimated that in 30\% of the works projects rotation mechanism was used for beneficiary enrollment to the program. However, the qualitative assessment interviews and field visit findings suggest that this ratio may have been much higher than recorded. It may be that the reporting of the number of workers was not done accurately – and whenever 2 workers were effectively sharing the number of days it was actually reported as only one worker.
communities in Sierra Leone and as a means to avoid any social unrest by those potentially excluded from the program. Even with the rotational arrangements in place in some communities, an ex post analysis conducted by NACSA and the World Bank found that over the course of phases one and two, about 47,000 people were turned away at CfWP sites as losers of lotteries or because they did not come early enough in first–come, first served arrangements, demonstrating the high level of demand for the program. With the rotation in place, a larger number of youths were able to earn some minimum income, even allowing some students to pay for their school fees (Dalan 2010 p. 24). However the rotation system had the effect of lowering the magnitude of transfers offered to participants, and of keeping the participation in the program open to everyone interested regardless of poverty level.

Box 3: Implication of Rotational Scheme on Number of Working Days

According to the beneficiary, the program lasted for a total of nine weeks in the community. Given that it was a “community program,” the work had to be spread round. There were three groups with 25 people per group. Each group was allowed to work for a total of three weeks and then withdrawn for another group to take over.

When the rotational system was first introduced, there were tensions and complaint from participants who obviously wanted to work longer. It was, however, explained to beneficiaries that the system was introduced as a way of extending the limited work opportunity to everyone in the community. Eventually this argument was accepted and everyone was satisfied with the rotational arrangement. (FGD, direct beneficiaries, Ndomahina Street, Kono)

Source: Dalan Development Consultants, 2010

4.2. Setting the Wage rate

The wage rate is a key program feature because it performs several important functions. First and foremost, it determines the benefits accruing to participants. Second, it can allow the self-selection of the poor into the program while discouraging the non-poor from participation. Third, the wage rate can significantly influence the overall cost and labor absorption potential of the program with consequential implications for its efficiency as a safety net. A higher wage rate will most likely attract the relatively non-poor and crowd out some of the real poor, in particular, where there is a budget constraint. As evidenced from the targeting discussion above, there appeared to be limitations to using the wage rate alone as a targeting mechanism, especially given the high poverty and underemployment that prevails in Sierra Leone. This brings into focus two questions for our discussion: Was the wage level appropriate? Could the wage rate be recalibrated to ensure smoother targeting?

*Was the wage level appropriate?*

Despite the wage setting principle identified above, in practice setting a wage level that accurately reflects local market wages is not an easy task. For example, one difficulty comes from the established minimum wage rate for Sierra Leone. According to the National

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Commission for the Social Action, the country does not have a minimum wage in the strict sense. Instead, the Regulations of Wages and Industrial Relations Act of 1971 sets the Government’s position on the subject by authorizing the Joint National Negotiating Board to fix minimum wages. According to the Commissioner, it is the Trade Group Councils that set the minimum wage for their respective trades, which are then submitted to the Government for approval. For roads works, which fall under the trade group of Building and Construction, it is the Construction Union that sets the minimum wage for the industry, and it is approved by the Government. Given the confusion on minimum wages, the question is whether the CfWP wage was prevailing wages.

Table 3 compares the daily wage rate offered by the program to rates offered for local concessions or similar unskilled tasks in the community. The concessionary rates are based on local (market) wage rates for unskilled labor in the locations, as estimated through interviews in the localities visited.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District/Area</th>
<th>CfW Daily wage (Leones)</th>
<th>Daily wages for similar work (Leones)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kono</td>
<td>7,500</td>
<td>12,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bo</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moyamba</td>
<td>7,000</td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Port Loko</td>
<td>6,500</td>
<td>8,000-10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bombali</td>
<td>6,500</td>
<td>8,000-10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Rural</td>
<td>7,000</td>
<td>12,000-15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Urban</td>
<td>7,000</td>
<td>20,000-25,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Dalan Development Consultants, 2010

As shown in table 3, the concessionary wage rate offered for unskilled labor was higher than what was paid by the program in every district. The difference is much higher in Freetown. In Kono the rate exceeds Le 10,000 because of the mining activities that also rely on manual labor. The rate offered by the program was also compared with daily (minimum) wage rates other ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) paid to unskilled laborers as well as rates offered by other development agencies implementing CfWP projects (see table 4).

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19 Telephone discussion with the Commissioner of NACSA on May 12, 2010.
20 See Section (3) of the Regulation of Wages and Industrial Relations Short Title Act of 1971.
Table 4: Wage Rates Offered for Unskilled Labor by Selected Government Agencies and Different CfW Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MDA</th>
<th>Wage Rate for Unskilled Labor (Le)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NaCSA CfW Program</td>
<td>6,000–7,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security-NERICA Project</td>
<td>6,000–10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Finance and Economic Development</td>
<td>6,827(^{21})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sierra Leone Roads Authority</td>
<td>5,000/Task(^{22})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COOPI CfW Program</td>
<td>7,000(^{23})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic Relief Services CfW Program</td>
<td>7,000(^{24})</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Dalan Development Consultants, 2010

Tables 3 and 4 suggest that the rate wage offered by the CfWP was relatively low – and in the theoretical sense appropriate, yet the program faced over-subscription. As mentioned above, this may simply reflect the realities of working in high unemployment and underemployment context\(^{25}\), whereby temporary employment opportunities such as those provided by the CfWP remain attractive to many. As in other Sub-Saharan African countries, many people are simply too poor to be unemployed and must take up work regardless of its quality or level of remuneration (Peeters et al 2009). So any work, even at a low wage, is better than no work.

**Could the wage rate be recalibrated to ensure smoother targeting?**

Where poverty and unemployment is widespread and affects a large part of the youth population, it is very difficult to determine a low enough, and at the same time politically acceptable, program wage that will attract only the neediest and the poorest. The CfWP wage rate seems to have attracted unemployed or underemployed individuals from wealthier households, who despite their relatively well-off status have a low reservation wage. What should be the future wage setting approach for the program?

While a lower wage rate would help, if only to spread work opportunities among a larger number of beneficiaries, politically, it would not be acceptable to decrease the wage rate below a certain level. This highlights the politically sensitive nature of government programs setting

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\(^{21}\) The Ministry of Finance does not pay daily wage to government employees. The lowest monthly salary for Grade 1 employees, which are unskilled laborers, is Le 150,204, which was divided by an average of 22 working days to arrive at Le 6,827 wage per day.

\(^{22}\) SLRA pays Le 5,000 per piece of task performed. A task in the road sector could for instance entail spot improving 10 meters of road section and not necessarily 8 hours of work per day.

\(^{23}\) This program was modeled after the NACSA CfW program and used the same wage scale in the region that they operated.

\(^{24}\) This program was modeled after the NACSA CfW program and used the same wage scale in the region that they operated.

\(^{25}\) Official unemployment in Sierra Leone amongst youth is 4% although this does not take into account demographic differences across groups and those who are inactive, underemployed and those with very low paying and low quality jobs. As an example, unemployment amongst urban youth of 15-19 is 17.4%.
wages far below other accepted "minimum" wage rates and whether there is a break-even point when poverty is so prevalent that the extra cost (administratively and socially) of trying to exclude the relative better off (but still reasonably poor) is not worth it.

The CfWP experience demonstrates the need to carefully think about the program wage rate but also suggests that it is unlikely that the program will be able to target the poorest relying solely on the program wage rate. It is thus crucial to put complimentary selection criteria in place. These criteria can be categorical criteria such as asset or land ownership to exclude relatively better off members of the community from the program.

4.3. Choice of Projects - Public Works Menu

The vast majority of interventions (80%) supported road maintenance and rehabilitation, while another 16% were in agriculture (in particular Inland Valley Swamp rice development, accounting for 10%). Almost the entire funding was therefore shared between these two sectors, with some residual investment in environmental projects. A number of criteria were also applied to guide the selection. The most restricting criterion (as is typically the case for labor-intensive public works programs) was the ratio between labor and non-labor costs which, as mentioned earlier, was set at 60% and 40% of each subproject cost.

Table 5: Profile of CfWP Phases 1 and 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of sub-projects</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>total</th>
<th>o/w female</th>
<th>o/w youth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Road rehabilitation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>579</td>
<td>2,213</td>
<td>6,419</td>
<td>5,030</td>
<td>17,207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inland Valley swamp (IVS) rice cultivation</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>403</td>
<td>376</td>
<td>893</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other agriculture (Cassava, vegetables, etc.)</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>591</td>
<td>1,177</td>
<td>865</td>
<td>1,945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>439</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (water)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>727</td>
<td>3,179</td>
<td>8,453</td>
<td>6,602</td>
<td>21,095</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although the communities were to take the lead in the formulation of eligible works projects, in practice the process was driven by the local councils. Local councils saw the opportunity to fund activities in the council development plans that were otherwise lacking funding, such as maintenance and rehabilitation of small roads. Ultimately, NACSA and local councils made the decisions about which activities to implement and later communicated to the target community. The subprojects that were given priority were to the extent possible already included in Local Council Development Plans. Other labor-intensive activities (such as reforestation or soil conservation activities) may not have been prioritized in the Local Council Development Plans in the first place – as Council Development Plans do not necessarily consider the labor-intensive dimension of the planned investments.

Chiefs and community elders were on the other hand largely excluded in decision making regarding activities that would be financed by CfWP funding. The experience of these stakeholders was that NaCSA did not necessarily consult them in identifying a community project that could be funded. News of project approval for communities often reached them after contracts had been awarded. Even though these local authorities did not normally have a say in what projects to undertake, they mostly agreed that the activities that were eventually funded by the program were indeed community priorities.

As projects were linked to existing council plans, the understanding was that the local councils would allocate funds out of their yearly budget for maintenance of the assets created. Local councils also had arrangements that predate the CfWP for managing community assets such as roads. Councils often cited the use of communal labor, which is usually organized by chiefs, to undertake road maintenance on a voluntary basis. In some localities, communal labor had been effectively utilized to keep the CfWP assets in good condition although this was not the case for other localities.

Finally, natural resources management, soil conservation, environment and climate change mitigation activities that are labor-intensive and may have a positive impact on food security have been the focus of a number of large public works program in Africa and elsewhere. However, such labor-intensive public works rely on techniques of which communities, and local councilors, may not always have previous knowledge or may not be familiar with. Therefore, they may not always be an obvious choice for communities, and may also require a greater involvement of central government agencies such as the Ministry of Agriculture or the Ministry of Environment for design and supervision. A positive menu of standard labor-intensive activities, coupled with appropriate awareness and capacity-development activities at the council and community levels, could have been a way to diversify the choice of public works activities.

There are several questions that the implementation experience highlights and for which this paper is not able to provide complete answers.

**First, did the choice of works projects yield the possible economic outcomes with respect to income transfers and value created?** Technically, putting the maximum weight on the rehabilitation/maintenance of feeder roads has served the temporary employment creation and income transfer program objectives of the program well. It has maximized number of person days of employment created and the portion of the program resources that was used
cash transfers. Lack of administrative data did not allow the assessment to assess the economic value of the infrastructure created however the qualitative assessment and reliance on the local development plans suggest that the infrastructure did indeed respond to the communities immediate needs in terms of access to markets and livelihood support. In the future, there is a need to evaluate better the value of the assets created as they absorb a significant (40%) portion of program resources and constitute an important output.

**Second, how well are the community assets being maintained?** The assessment did not include questions on this aspect as it was too early in the implementation. The Implementation Completion Report for the first two phases of the Cash for Work Program is also silent on the status of assets created other than stating that the maintenance is the responsibility of local authorities and communities for these types of assets.

**Third, would fuller community involvement in the selection of the works projects have made a difference with respect to benefits accruing to communities?** The qualitative assessment suggests that stronger involvement of communities in the selection of the works projects is needed and desirable by beneficiaries to ensure community oversight in the selection of beneficiaries and implementation of works. This recommendation was taken into account in the Cash for Work component of the ongoing YESP.

### 4.4. Program Benefits and Quality

**Magnitude of Transfer**

Each beneficiary household was entitled to work up to 50 days and receive a maximum transfer of SLe 300,000-350,000. The transfer was equivalent in nominal terms to about 40% of the annual poverty line for one equivalent adult as measured by the 2003/2004 Integrated Household Survey. In real terms the proportion was lower given inflation since then, and it must also be emphasized that many households tend to have about four equivalent adult members. Still, the transfers could have had a large impact on poverty (especially the poverty gap and squared poverty gap) among beneficiaries if they had reached primarily the poor, as was evidenced in the assessment for the similar project carried out in Liberia (Backiny-Yetna et al., 2012b; Andrews et al., 2011).

In practice, in part due to the rotation arrangements used in some communities, the average amounts transferred per beneficiary or household were lower (they ranged between SLe 126,000 and SLe 300,000) depending on the number of weeks that beneficiaries were allowed

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26 Implementation and Completion Results Report, National Social Action Project, June 28, 2011.
27 An equivalent of US$90-112.
28 The 2003/2004 Sierra Leone Integrated Household Survey (SLIHS), which gives the most recent information on poverty in the country, the food/extreme poverty line was estimated at Le 1,033 ($0.34) per day per equivalent adult, and the full poverty line at Le 2,111 ($0.69) per day per equivalent adult.
29 It is estimated that rotation arrangements were used in about 30% of the communities/sub-projects. This may be an under-estimation since this was not explicitly tracked and recorded by NACSA. The estimate is authors’ calculation based on data on total wages paid and person days worked for 729 works projects.
to work before rotating\textsuperscript{30}. The rotation arrangement inevitably reduced program impact vis-à-vis households’ ability to cope with the price increases. In its subsequent phases, as mentioned earlier, the program officially endorsed rotation arrangements used to subscribe beneficiaries to the program (depending on the labor supply and community dynamics) along with the lottery and first-come-first-serve mechanisms.

**Beneficiary Perceptions of program benefits and quality**

A series of questions on subjective perceptions regarding the program were also asked to program participants during the quantitative assessment, the results of which are provided in Table 6. Most participants declared that they had not done this type of work before and that they acquired skills that they would be able to use later. They also learned to be punctual. The assignments that they received were clear, and corruption (bribes paid by participants) was on the low side according to participants. While some participants experienced delays in being paid, this was limited to approximately one in five participants.

\textsuperscript{30} Authors’ estimation based on the project administrative database. It was not possible to establish accurately the minimum number of days a beneficiary may have worked. The calculation is based on average number of days worked per works project which we think underestimates the numbers of workers recorded and hence the average number of workdays and earnings.
Table 6: Subjective Indicators of Program Quality among Participants (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Relation to Head</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Head</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has done this type of work before</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>26.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has gained technical skills</td>
<td>86.4</td>
<td>83.6</td>
<td>86.6</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has learned to be punctual</td>
<td>98.7</td>
<td>97.8</td>
<td>98.3</td>
<td>98.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through the program</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>94.5</td>
<td>95.8</td>
<td>94.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has gained skills helping later</td>
<td>88.9</td>
<td>86.5</td>
<td>88.4</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment was clear</td>
<td>83.7</td>
<td>85.6</td>
<td>83.1</td>
<td>87.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has worked too hard</td>
<td>69.2</td>
<td>60.9</td>
<td>69.5</td>
<td>54.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has paid a bribe</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The salary was fair</td>
<td>36.6</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>36.8</td>
<td>45.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Experienced payment delays</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>20.8</td>
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Source: Backiny-Yetna and Wodon (2012a)

Also, the creation of new community assets has probably brought at the community level additional benefits, particularly in the form of improved roads that have increased access to communities. More vehicles are able to transit the roads and this has eased local transport (in particular motorbikes) and facilitated access to markets, administrative centers, and health facilities. The capacity to maintain these assets is however sometimes questionable. In some instances, communities and Local Councils may have capacity to maintain roads over time, while in other cases where this may not be possible, in which case it may be more meaningful in the future to consider other types of projects that will generate more durable benefits for the communities and their population.

At the household level, the qualitative assessment reports that beneficiaries valued highly the short term employment and supplemental income. The assessment found that earnings were primarily used to purchase food for the household. Some beneficiaries utilized a portion of the wages to pay for school and medical expenses. In a few cases, some women were able to save a portion of their income and set up small businesses, as discussed below. On the negative side, the program raised expectations amongst youths for longer term employment opportunities which it was not meant to deliver, and these expectations will need to be managed.
4.5. Program monitoring and transparency

The program was housed at the Social and Economic Opportunities Directorate (SOCEP) of NaCSA. NaCSA had the overall responsibility to keep project activities on track so that they could be completed on schedule, in line with the approved budget, and at the expected standards. Nevertheless, the oversight functions were divided amongst several stakeholders, with varying roles and levels of authority.

The program was implemented in a decentralized context in 7 districts, with plans to expand to 14 districts. The program relied on the network of NaCSA field staff, local authorities, technical agencies, civil society organizations (youth groups), and the private sector at the local level. The arrangement required effective coordination mechanisms not only at the center but also at field level. The director of SOCEP was responsible for general oversight of the program. On the basis of initial program implementation experiences, a number of features proved important for program monitoring and transparency.

Roles and Responsibilities: Based on the works project menu, NACSA had formal agreements with ministries and technical agencies whose inputs were necessary at different stages of program implementation. The technical agencies SLRA and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security (MAFFS) played limited roles in monitoring and overseeing the implementation of program activities. They were involved in monitoring activities for which they had the requisite expertise, and in many situations they acted as technical advisors. The local councils were expected to participate in joint monitoring and supervision of works with NACSA. The local authorities were informed of all activities in their jurisdiction and they were loosely involved in supervision. Beneficiary accounts\(^{31}\) suggest that the fact that local council officials did visit sites was a positive action that may have sent important signals to contractors that the council was watching, and may thus directly or indirectly have helped in holding contractors accountable for their actions.

Communities also provided oversight, in particular, through community leaders and elders, on the beneficiary selection process and adherence to the criteria set forth for the selection of beneficiaries, as well as the use of the rotation process. This facilitated better acceptance of the program within communities, and provided – at least in principle, an added guarantee for communities that the selection process was fair and transparent. In its third phase, under the Youth Employment Support program, youth representatives of youth councils were deployed to oversee the registration at the worksites including the lotteries. In addition, as mentioned before, Community Oversight Committees have assumed an active role in the selection of the appropriate method of beneficiary enrollment in each community as well as enforcement of the selection criteria.

Grievance management: There was neither a formal mechanism to lodge grievances in the program, nor any system to follow-up and resolve complaints. The qualitative assessment conducted during the first phase of the CfWP reveals areas where beneficiaries did have

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\(^{31}\) Dalan Consultants, Qualitative Assessment of Cash for Work Programs for Sierra Leone. Freetown, Sierra Leone. 2010, P. 47
complaints. These complaints related especially to the way the beneficiary selection was conducted, for example the fact that some contractors seem to have brought workers from outside the community. In its third phase, under the Youth Employment Support program, a grievance mechanism has been put in place. Information dissemination on the grievance mechanism has accelerated in 2012. Youth Councils (in each local council) are active in channeling complaints to the Youth Commission. More importantly, beneficiaries are now able to call in anonymously or send a text message to a call center housed in the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development Integrated Program Management Unit. Complaints to date range from: information requests on the program processes to allegations for corruption which were subsequently investigated.

**Management Information System:** NACSA has a management information system which captures program administrative data. The database is managed centrally in the NACSA Freetown office. Monthly and quarterly progress reports on the status of works are compiled in district offices and sent in to be entered centrally. Near the end of the project, the limitations of NACSA’s M&E system for CfWP became apparent, as the data from sub-Project Completion Reports (PCRs) were not aggregated in one comprehensive database allowing for full exploitation of the data on project indicators. Instead, separate databases existed for individual CfWP indicators until a unified database was created for the ICR. As the program matures, it will become important to move from a simple record keeping system (communities, beneficiaries, payments, geographic location, etc) to a more systematic way of capturing and analyzing data, ideally with an electronic platform linking major data points.

Under the YESP and the new phase of the CfWP, data entry has become more regular. While PCRs are still paper-based, they are now aggregated into a single master database as they are received from the field, making project administrative data available in a timelier manner. There is also new thinking about establishing an electronic beneficiary registry however suitable options for the country capacity context need to be studied.

**4.6. Social Cohesion: The Role of communities, women and youth**

In a fragility and post-conflict context, public works programs may have the potential to promote social cohesion through the participation of the community, among others; for program processes, and the social inclusion of excluded groups such as women and youths. In these respects the program appears to have had different impacts.

**Role of Communities:** Despite NACSA’s well-established communication channels with a large network of communities and design parameters, in the initial phase of the program, community resources were not fully utilized to assist in key program processes such as beneficiary selection, project selection, and monitoring. This may have been a reflection of the emergency nature of the program and the implementing agency’s desire to maintain necessary speed and efficiency. Works projects were selected through a mechanical exercise with the local councils relying on lists of existing local council projects fitting the works menu as opposed to relying on
new proposals form communities. As mentioned earlier, communities were often informed about the choice of the project and the location after the selection made.\textsuperscript{32}

Communities were involved in the selection of beneficiaries and ultimately in the decision not to implement lotteries in favor of rotation arrangements in order to distribute benefits more widely and evenly amongst the community. However, the extent of participation was not consistent and well regulated by NACSA or the local councils. Similarly, communities had little role in program monitoring and in resolving grievances and disputes.

This weakness was remedied in the new phase of the program whereby project selection was systematically based on community proposals with community representatives and leaders being assigned a more formal role to monitor the worksites and execution of first–come, first–served mechanisms or lotteries. There is however still room to expand the communities’ role to improve beneficiary selection and for the resolution of grievances.

**Youth Integration:** The program encouraged the creation of youth groups which could act as works contractors. About 14% of the works contractors were youth groups.\textsuperscript{33} There is however no evidence on whether most of these groups continued to work in the construction sector.

The qualitative assessment also suggests that the program has spurred further collective action and group entrepreneurship. Some beneficiaries (mostly women) managed to save some of their earnings to set up small businesses, which they continue to manage. One youth group in Kono - the Community Partnership for Development (CoPaD) - encouraged beneficiaries to pay part of their wages received into a fund, and eventually they were able to save Le 3,000,000 (USD 700). The group has been lending money to its members, and so far the loans and interest are being repaid. In the new phase of the program, there is a more deliberate effort to train small contractors (youth groups and other) to create a base of young entrepreneurs in the construction sector.

**Women Participation and Voice:** Administrative data confirms that the participation of women in the program on average was somewhat low (29.5%), although very near the target that had been set for the program (30%). Several explanations may be advanced to explain why fewer women than men participated.

First, working on road construction, which was the dominant type of works, is often more physically challenging for women than men (as beneficiaries noted in focus group discussions and interviews), and thereby affecting participation rates. This may have been reinforced by the fact that, at least in some communities, the contractors seemed to have recruited the beneficiaries themselves, with a high probability that they were not then giving priority to women.

\textsuperscript{32} Qualitative Assessment, Dalan Consulting, 2010
\textsuperscript{33} Calculated based on a sample of 729 works projects implemented during August 2008 and January 2011.
Second, the lack of on-site childcare arrangements seems to have also been an important factor in discouraging young women with children, and especially lactating mothers, to participate. The project design had anticipated that, where necessary, caregivers would be recruited to watch over children and would have received the same wage as other beneficiaries. At a few sites, caregivers were indeed hired and paid the regular wage. But at many other sites, contractors did not hire caregivers. It was therefore left to the women to find someone to look after their children while they worked. It was often the case that these women gave some of the wages earned to those who had helped with caring for their children. Consequently, the affected women earned less than other beneficiaries that did not have to make private arrangements for childcare. Participation of women also varied from region to region, partly due to social and cultural factors.

In the subsequent phases, NACSA intensified its efforts to improve participation of women and strengthened its communication on the issue to ensure that contractors hire caregivers at worksites where necessary and women have more flexibility in terms of workload. In addition, the works menu was adjusted to include a higher percentage of agriculture related works which women tend to prefer.

CHAPTER V: LESSONS LEARNED AND LOOKING AHEAD

While the CfWP was intended as a one-off intervention to address the immediate effects of the food price crisis, its implementation experiences are informative for future social protection programming in both Sierra Leone and other similar contexts. This concluding section looks at the emerging lessons under the first phase of the CfWP and considers future policy and programming options in light of Sierra Leone’s evolving policy context.

5.1. Lessons Learned

Apart from the risk and vulnerability profile of its population and its economy to external shocks, administrative and human capacity and financial constraints make Sierra Leone a difficult environment to launch and implement safety net programs. While the CfWP experience has demonstrated that local capacity and resources can be leveraged to implement safety net programs even in highly constrained environments, some lessons from the first phase of the program are worth emphasizing.

It appears that in a context such as that of Sierra Leone, CFW programs are appropriate, but the challenge of achieving good targeting should not be underestimated. If inclusion errors cannot be limited and if positive externalities are not evident from the assets being created, then the cost effectiveness and value of public works vis-à-vis other safety net programming options must be reconsidered. It could be that the relative weak targeting observed in the program was related to the multiple objectives “assumed” under the program beyond its stated objective: (i) increasing wage-transfers to the poor and food insecure, (ii) supporting youth employment (not necessarily among the very poor), and (iii) supporting local development priorities as well as social cohesion. Given the context of the food price crisis, the main objective of the program should have been to maximize the wage transfers from the program to the most vulnerable.
But it could be that there were tensions between this and the need to respond to “other socioeconomic “factors. The fact that the program had to be implemented as an emergency response may also have impacted the choice of certain processes over others during implementation, which in return has resulted in weak targeting.

A second lesson concerns the recognition of the value of rapid program assessment methods. Such rapid qualitative and quantitative assessments fielded early on during implementation can be very useful and instrumental in assessing appropriateness of program design features and in introducing adjustments. Experience from many large scale and long standing public works programs indicate that rigorous program monitoring and periodic assessments are key to improving program targeting (reducing errors of inclusion and exclusion), governance mechanisms, payments, adjusting wages and benefits amongst others. In this case, the light assessment provided substantial findings/lessons on program implementation which were then fed into the design of the subsequent phases of the CfWP. Although not always conclusive, the assessment provided an overview of beneficiary perceptions of the programs and evidence on processes that could be improved. The second phase of the CfWP and the subsequent Youth Employment Support program were designed with the results of the qualitative and quantitative assessments and findings of regular program supervision in mind. For example, the subsequent phases of the program introduced stricter application of beneficiary selection criteria, geographic targeting, and better oversight amongst others. The CfWP will continue to benefit from annual rapid assessments as the program continues to evolve.

On targeting still, what could be the way forward? One possibility would be to rely on mixed targeting approaches, as opposed to relying solely on the wage rate for self-targeting. This is because in country contexts where underemployment and unemployment are widespread and most of the opportunities are in the informal sector and low productivity jobs, the public works programs offering even below market wages are likely to be oversubscribed. When wage setting alone may not yield the desired self-targeting of the neediest and the most vulnerable, it may need to be combined with community targeting mechanisms, whereby communities decide on who should participate based on a number of pre-agreed criteria, as has been done in a number of similar programs in other countries. In its later phases, the CfWP and YESP also introduced improved geographical targeting (of poor and vulnerable communities rather than just food insecure districts) as well as Community Oversight Committees to oversee the beneficiary selection process which should have reduced the reliance on self-targeting and pressure for rationing of program benefits. The targeting performance of the CfWP (under YESP) with these innovations is in the process of being evaluated with results expected by the end of 2012. Nevertheless, setting a low wage rate remains important, even if not always politically attractive for program design for the Sierra Leone Cash for Work program, so that more may benefit from the program at the same overall program cost.

A number of other lessons were learned as well. For example, it is important to assess whether the public works indeed meet the needs of communities. Improvements in data collection could also be considered. The CfWP relies on manual recording of key administrative data; i.e. employee rosters, payment records, sub-project implementation data on number of workers and other are paper based and first processed at the district level before being compiled at the central NACSA offices. This process had the potential of introducing errors with implications for
an accurate assessment of program implementation status and impact. Alternative and more reliable mechanisms for data capture must be considered for every stage of the program. This may mean re-thinking beneficiary registration and payments processes to introduce use of technology, such as using ID cards and automation of payments to beneficiaries through banks or cell phones to allow an automatic record trail that can be easily compiled.

What about the role of the community role in program implementation? Sierra Leone had a fairly strong track record of community driven development established in the immediate aftermath of the civil war. Communities implemented social and economic infrastructure projects working with NACSA and have re-developed awareness for their competencies and collective action. The first phase of the CfWP was not able to take full advantage of this capacity. Instead communities were somewhat marginalized in the selection of work sites, monitoring of the works and not fully utilized in the selection of the beneficiaries. Effective community participation in various aspects of program implementation can reduce administrative costs and improve social cohesion. As already mentioned, there is also evidence suggesting that community involvement increase targeting performance given its advantages regarding access to information (Conning and Kevane 2002; Platteau and Abraham 2002; Subbarao 1997).

Finally, in terms of controls, oversight and supervision, weak monitoring systems and information flows within the implementing agency has limited the ability of NACSA to recognize implementation trends and react quickly when program improvements were needed. Even though, there is recognition of the need to systematize data collection, entry and dissemination, further progress towards a better management information system will take time. The qualitative and quantitative assessments suggest that NACSA oversight of the program was only partially adequate. Some important program guidelines were not followed or enforced. An illustrative example is the extent of authority and discretion works contractors had with not enough controls. Key processes of beneficiary selection, administration of lotteries and beneficiary tracking (i.e. daily worker logs) and payments of beneficiaries were overseen by the contractors. Although there was NACSA and local council presence at the worksites, beneficiary interviews suggest that the controls were not sufficient to prevent abuse of basic program principles by the contractors. Program oversight and controls need to be a shared responsibility between NACSA, local councils and communities.

5.2. Looking Ahead

Safety net policies and programming in Sierra Leone have evolved since the first phase of the CfWP in 2008-9. Recent consecutive years of financial and food crisis have helped to raise awareness amongst policy makers on the need to move from current ad hoc emergency safety net programs to longer term national systems that respond to shocks and protect the poor over time. In this context, there is increased interest in reviewing the effectiveness of existing programs to improve their impact on poverty and vulnerability and in exploring ways to rationalize safety net spending. In particular, the Government of Sierra Leone and program implementers have developed a keen interest in ensuring the transparency and equity of the CfWP given the visibility and “popular” nature of the program.
In practice, the subsequent phases of the program and the Youth Employment Support Project (YESP) have taken on board all the operational lessons in design and implementation mentioned here. The program overall is built upon improved design principles on beneficiary identification, targeting, and monitoring and oversight in response to results of the qualitative assessment, periodic supervision reports and the quick assessment. The program also expanded its geographical coverage. Over 25,000 households are expected to benefit from the YESP Cash for Work which represents over 30% increase in population coverage.

The Youth Employment Support Project has two components which address short term and longer term vulnerability and youth employment concerns, and attempt to bring together the protection and promotion agendas of cash for work in an experimental way. The first component is the continuation of the cash for work program with additional design features and improvements. This component aims to protect the poor from falling into deeper poverty by offering them short term employment and a cash transfer. The program also intends to address supply side labor market constraints for very low skill unemployed or underemployed poor youth and provide skills training to a limited number of individuals interested in pursuing careers as a small works contractor. This new feature partially addresses the concerns raised by beneficiaries about the short term nature of the program and its inability to link beneficiaries to future employment opportunities. The second component is an innovative safety net intervention which aims to address supply and demand side labor market constraints and increase the employability of youth with little education and skills through the provision of an assistance package including training (life skills and technical), apprenticeship, and cash or asset transfer.

Both components have built in impact or process assessments to allow further learning and to provide adequate evidence to policy makers on program effectiveness and potential for scale up. The program became active in October 2010 and implementation experiences to date indicate that use of improved processes is resulting in smoother execution and more transparent distribution of benefits.

Going forward, the policy dialogue on safety nets will continue to evolve in particular as the results of the YES program as well as the results of the ongoing social protection assessment become available. In this context, no matter what the nature of safety net interventions may be, Sierra Leone will need a stronger strategic platform to hinge its safety net interventions on. The Cabinet approved a national social protection strategy that will need to be elaborated in light of the review of existing social protection initiatives and of institutional mandates of government departments providing social protection services. This policy instrument would identify how the social protection system (or the combination of interventions) will provide services and incentives to beneficiaries on the three aspects of protection, promotion and prevention.

The most immediate priorities therefore involve the strengthening of basic building blocks of the YES program, which could also help as a centralized administrative platform supporting social protection interventions more broadly. Implementation of YES has spurred discussion on how to use this program as a platform to work on the building blocks of a safety net system comprising of the following elements: Targeting, Beneficiary Enrollment and Registration,
Payment Systems, Grievance Mechanism, and Monitoring and Oversight. Sierra Leone has a unique opportunity to use the learning which the YES program will yield and to work on setting up and adjusting its basic systems (i.e. targeting, payments, beneficiary enrolment and registry, monitoring and grievance mechanisms) gradually.
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Dalan Consultants, 2010, *Qualitative Assessment of Cash for Work Programs for Sierra Leone*. Freetown, Sierra Leone.


The entity that finances the program does not necessarily need to be the one that implements it. A variety of financing and implementation arrangements exist in countries’ public-private-donor partnerships; these are explored in section 3.3.
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Abstract

This paper presents an assessment of the first phase (2008-2009) of Sierra Leone’s Cash for Work program based on a qualitative and quantitative analysis examining program design features, main processes and impact. The assessment highlights that while Cash for Work was an appropriate crisis response, the challenge of achieving good targeting should not be underestimated. Findings from the assessment point to high inclusion errors of non-poor population quintiles, despite the program apparently following many rules of best practice in program design. The assessment points to a series of factors to explain targeting performance, and proposes that future strategies consider mixed methods with a greater emphasis on the role of communities in affecting overall outcomes. The assessment notes areas of success during implementation, including the impact of the program in promoting cohesion amongst youth groups, as well as women. In this sense the assessment points to future strategies and options for moving Cash for Work forward under its expanded incarnation of the Youth Employment Support Project. Through the use of light qualitative and quantitative methods, the paper also advocates for similar assessments where monitoring and evaluation capacity are weak and time constraints tight.

Cash for Work in Sierra Leone: A Case Study on the Design and Implementation of a Safety Net in Response to a Crisis

Colin Andrews, Mirey Ovadiya, Christophe Ribes Ros, and Quentin Wodon

November 2012