

Global Risk Financing Facility: Technical Talks



Session Title: Sierra Leone Country Project

Session Summary

Total Registrations: 153 | Number of countries represented: 43



Opening Remarks: Iffath Sharif (Practice Manager, Social Protection and Jobs [SP&J], World Bank Group [WBG]) discussed the importance and relevance of the GRiF grant to the Sierra Leone Social Safety Net Project.



Sierra Leone Social Safety Net Project: Thomas Vaughan Bowen (Social Protection Specialist, SP&J), WBG) delivered a lightning presentation to explain the objective and activities financed by the GRiF grant in Sierra Leone, which adapted to respond to COVID-19 using emergency cash-transfers.



Technical Interview: Junko Onishi (Senior Social Protection Specialist, SP&J, WBG), Abu Kargbo (Senior Social Protection Specialist, SP&J, WBG) and Thomas Vaughan Bowen (Social Protection Specialist, SP&J, WBG) were interviewed by Sumati Rajput (Financial Sector Specialist, Crisis and Disaster Risk Finance [CDRF], WBG) on how the GRiF grant linked to the USD 4 million in IDA funds enabled a quick and effective emergency cash-transfer response for COVID-19. The technical conversation focused on details of operationalizing the response on the ground, challenges that emerged, and learnings for future safety net shock-response.



Audience Interaction: Kaavya Krishna (Senior Financial Sector Specialist, CDRF, WBG) facilitated the session which featured live polls and audience engagement questions. Sumati Rajput concluded with a facilitated Q&A session.



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Key Takeaways

1. Pre-arranged finance and robust delivery systems need to work together



Setting aside contingent funds was crucial for the COVID-19 emergency response:

Over the last decade, Sierra Leone has used shock-responsive social protection to respond to Ebola and the 2017 landslides. These experiences helped create awareness of how useful safety net systems can be when it comes to shock response, but also how challenging it can be to mobilize quick finance, since humanitarian assistance arrives with delay. This experience led the Government of Sierra Leone to set aside contingency funds, which helped the country to rapidly program its first set of cash transfer response - which was also the fastest safety net response for COVID-19 in the Africa region.



Identifying clear rules for mobilizing those funds was equally crucial:

The government prepared an emergency response manual that clearly outlined the standard operating procedures for operationalizing the scale up, allowing for a more coordinated response. As a result of this process, the European Union, as one of the development partners who engaged actively in the coordination process, decided to provide an additional EUR 4.7 million for a second round of cash transfers to an additional 36,000 households.



A long-term risk financing strategy is essential for the country:

Amounts like USD 4 million in contingency finance, and post-disaster humanitarian resources, are not sufficient for effectively managing financial impacts of disasters in Sierra Leone. For the country to respond to emergencies more effectively, it needs to have a robust longer-term risk financing strategy, because no one instrument is sufficient to address the financial impacts of small and large events. Linking other such instruments to delivery channels like safety nets will allow larger volumes of cash transfers to flow to affected populations more rapidly, with lesser reliance on ex-post finance for immediate response.

2. Getting the building blocks right can enable quicker and more effective scale-up of safety nets



Long term investments in foundational safety net delivery systems allowed quick expansion to target beneficiaries:

Over the last several years, Sierra Leone has built the foundations of its social safety net system. For example, the government has developed its targeting, enrolment, registration, payment, and grievance redress systems. These have all been adapted in response to previous crises. The targeting system, for example, was tweaked when providing cash transfers in response to the Ebola epidemic, providing lessons for the targeting approach to COVID-19.



Amending the pre-existing payment service provider contract helped expedite payments in new areas: Under the existing safety net, the government already had Rokel Commercial Bank (RCB) on contract. Once the decision was made to scale up the safety net, the government was able to quickly tweak the existing payment service provider contract to include payments in urban areas. RCB also piloted digital cash transfers to beneficiaries using mobile phones, which had previously been used after the landslides through other payment providers. If a beneficiary did not have a mobile phone, they were able to obtain a printout that was equivalent to the e-voucher. However, problems could arise in cases where the printouts were lost. Ultimately, taking advantage of the availability of financial institutions and of digital infrastructure in urban areas enabled the government to innovate and adapt its cash transfer system, building more confidence that this approach can work effectively in response to shocks and disasters.



Communication is crucial: When the second round of financing faced delays in reaching beneficiaries, the government was able to communicate with target populations through their own channels and through RCB's communications system, to advise them of the expected date that they would receive their funds.

Overall, key to the success of this project was the country's past experience, which highlighted the need for pre-arranged financing and predefined protocols. When the country was hit by the Ebola outbreak in 2014 and experienced landslides and floods in 2017, it faced challenges in creating a coherent, coordinated and timely response. Based on lessons learned from that experience, the government committed to set aside pre-arranged financing and strengthen its delivery systems to quickly get funding to affected populations when needed. This willingness to learn from the past contributed to its rapid cash transfer response to COVID-19.

Additional Resources

To learn more about the Sierra Leone Social Safety Project, read "[Safety Nets, Health Crises and Natural Disasters: Lessons from Sierra Leone.](#)"

More Information

To share your thoughts on the Technical Talks, please [click here](#).

To learn more about the Global Risk Financing Facility, please visit <https://www.globalriskfinancing.org/>

Contact Information

Technical Team Leads: [Benedikt Signer](#) and [Sumati Rajput](#)

To learn more about the Sierra Leone Social Safety Net Project, please contact [Junko Onishi](#), [Abu Kargbo](#) or [Thomas Bowen](#).



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