A National Monitoring and Evaluation Agency (NaMEA)

Monitoring Report on

The Productive Social Safety Nets and Youth Employment (PSSNYE) Project

With Monitoring Financial Support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

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Ensuring Value for Money, Transparency, and Accountability for Development Results and Better Service Delivery

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ii Acronyms

ACC	Anti-Corruption Commission
AF	Additional Financing
CERC	Contingent Emergency Response Component
ECT	Emergency Cash Transfer
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GPW	Green Public Works
KII	Key Informant Interview
MDA	Ministry, Department, or Agency
MOYA	Ministry of Youth Affairs
NaCSA	National Commission for Social Action
NaMEA	National Monitoring and Evaluation Agency
NaYCOM	National Youth Commission
NCPWD	National Commission for Persons with Disability
NEET	Not in Education, Employment, or Training
PDO	Project Development Objective
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
PSSNYE	Productive Social Safety Net and Youth Employment
PWD	Person with Disability
SCfW	Sustainable Cash for Work
SSN	Social Safety Net
SLUDI	Sierra Leone Union on Disability Issues
SPRINT	Social Protection Registry for Integrated National Targeting

1 Executive Summary

1.1 Details

This report presents monitoring findings and proffers recommendations across seven of the nine Sub-Components and Component 5, Contingent Emergency Response (CERC) on the Covid-19 Emergency Cash Transfer (ECT) III of the Productive Social Safety Net and Youth Employment (PSSNYE) Project.

The Productive Social Safety Net and Youth Employment (PSSNYE) project is a US$42 million grant **financed by the World Bank and the Government of Sierra Leone implemented in Sierra Leone through the National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA)**. The project's overarching objective is to ***improve access to social safety nets and income-generating opportunities for targeted beneficiaries***, including the aged, extreme poor, youth, women, and persons with disabilities, while also providing a rapid and effective response in times of crisis, such as through emergency cash transfer. The project is designed to address longstanding constraints in the country's social protection and youth employment schemes, especially the exclusion of the poorest households from cash-based support and opportunities for sustainable livelihoods.

To achieve the project objectives, the project is structured into five components:

1. **SSN Cash Transfers and Economic Inclusion Support:** Direct cash transfers to the aged and piloting economic inclusion support.
2. **Labor-Intensive Public Works:** Sustainable Cash for Work (SCfW) in rural areas, Green Public Works (GPW) in urban areas, and Digital Public Works (DPW) in urban areas.
3. **Employment and Entrepreneurship Support for Youth:** Support for youth-led household enterprises and the establishment of a platform to support youth employability.
4. **Systems Development and Institutional Strengthening:** Enhancing the capacity of NaCSA and implementing partners.
5. **Contingent Emergency Response Component (CERC):** This initial provisional zero-allocation CERC enables rapid reallocation of uncommitted project funds during major shocks. CERC may fund other social protection measures outlined in the Emergency Response Manual (ERM). The component, with the provisional zero-allocation later received a $6.1 million through Additional Financing (AF) Report No: PAD5405.

The monitoring, conducted by the National Monitoring and Evaluation Agency (NaMEA) in August and September 2025, was funded by UNDP[1]. NaMEA conducted this monitoring to assess progress towards the PDO, identify implementation bottlenecks, and gather stakeholder feedback to inform corrective actions. The exercise covered 7 of the 9 sub-components and the Contingency Emergency Response Component (CERC) across 15 towns/villages (in 8 Districts), incorporating feedback from 326 beneficiaries and 15 implementing partner institutions.

Overall, the PSSNYE project demonstrates significant potential but still faces some systemic implementation challenges. Key findings indicate:

- **Income Generating Opportunities (Components 2 & 3)** are making positive impacts, providing short-term employment and fostering entrepreneurship, though they are affected by non-payment of some of the GPW benefits, payment and procurement delays for SCfW, and insufficient post-training support for Component 3 beneficiaries.
- **Social Safety Nets (Components 1 & 5)** are facing challenges to achieve their objectives. Issues with non-payment of some benefits, challenging electronic payment systems, inaccurate beneficiary data in some components such as cash transfer, and payment delays pose concerns about beneficiary trust in the system, and limiting access to the much-needed support.
- **Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs)** is low across all components, and is not meeting the 15% PAD target of beneficiaries. Specialized PWD national institutions like the National Commission for Persons with Disability (NCPWD) and the Sierra Leone Union on Disability Issues (SLUDI) attributed this NaCSA's weak coordination with their institutions.
- **Cross-cutting challenges** include delays in fund disbursement to partners, challenging grievance redress mechanism due to limited staff, protracted response to from SIM service providers to non-payment of beneficiaries, and logistical constraints that hinder effective implementation by implementing partners and at the NaCSA District office level.

1.2 Conclusion

The project initiatives for job creation and youth entrepreneurship are demonstrating positive results and strong community demand. However, its challenges to effectively deliver social safety nets need to be surmounted to achieve its overall objective of improved access to safety nets.

[1] The monitoring, was funded by UNDP as part of the ***Transforming Sierra Leone – Evidence-Based Pathways to a Sustainable Future*** initiative

A strategic reconsideration of the project's architecture may be necessary. The complex and distinct challenges of delivering reliable social safety nets versus facilitating income-generating opportunities indicate that separating these two sectors into distinct (standalone) projects or implementation streams could make delivery less complex, simpler to manage, and more effective in addressing the unique challenges of each sector.

1.3 Recommendations

Prioritized recommendations include

- the resolution of all outstanding payments and SIM card issues with service providers;
- engage and formalize collaboration with PWD institutions to increase PWD participation;
- conduct a comprehensive review of beneficiary data to sanitise the beneficiary data management system; and
- ensuring the timely flow of funds and logistics to implementing partners.

Addressing these challenges is essential for the PSSNYE project to achieve its core objective of improving access to social safety nets and income-generating opportunities for Sierra Leone's most vulnerable populations.

2 Introduction/Background

Sierra Leone has a large and growing youth population, with over three-quarters of the population under the age of 35.[2] While unemployment is low, high rates of underemployment and a high number of youth who are "Not in Education, Employment, or Training" (NEET)—particularly among urban youth, young women, and those with disabilities—pose a major threat to stability. [3] The government has committed to creating 500,000 jobs as part of the **Big Five Game Changers,** driving the implementation of the **Medium-Term National Development Plan _2024- 2030** . The economy must create approximately 100,000 new jobs annually to meet this target.

From a social protection perspective, the Government has a proven track record of using social protection systems to respond to major shocks such as Ebola, COVID-19, and natural disasters. However, critical gaps remain, including limited coverage that misses vulnerable populations and a lack of linkage between social safety nets (SSNs) and employment opportunities. The Productive Social Safety Net and Youth Employment (PSSNYE) project is designed to address these intertwined challenges.

The PSSNYE is a $42 million grant World Bank-funded project with NaCSA as the lead implementing agency, in collaboration with other MDAs managing some of the sub-components. The project started in June 2022 and is expected to end in June 2027.

2.1 The Project Development Objective (PDO)

The PDO is to *"improve access to social safety nets and income generating opportunities for targeted beneficiaries,"* including the aged, extreme poor, youth, women, and persons with disabilities.

To achieve the PDO, the project is structured into five components:

1. **SSN Cash Transfers and Economic Inclusion Support:** Direct cash transfers to the aged and piloting economic inclusion support.

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[2] World Bank. 2020. *Sierra Leone - Country Partnership Framework for the Period FY21–FY26*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/300471600361287722/sierra-leone-country-partnership-framework-for-the-period-fy21-fy26

[3] Analysis based on data from the Sierra Leone Integrated Household Survey (SLIHS) 2018. The specific NEET rate for youth (15-35) is 18%, compared to 13% for non-youth (36-64). Disaggregated rates are 22% for urban youth, 19% for female youth, and 31% for youth with disabilities. Statistics Sierra Leone (Stats SL). (2018). *Sierra Leone Integrated Household Survey (SLIHS) 2018: Labour Force Survey Report*. Freetown: Statistics Sierra Leone

2. **Productive Labor-Intensive Public Works:** Sustainable Cash for Work (SCfW) in rural areas, Green Public Works (GPW) in urban areas, and Digital Public Works (DPW) in urban areas.

3. **Employment and Entrepreneurship Support for Youth:** Support for youth-led household enterprises and an IT platform for employability.

4. **Systems Development and Institutional Strengthening:** Enhancing the capacity of NaCSA and partners.

5. **Contingent Emergency Response Component (CERC):** This provisional zero-allocation CERC enables rapid reallocation of uncommitted project funds during major shocks. CERC may fund other social protection measures outlined in the Emergency Response Manual (ERM). The component, with the provisional zero-allocation later received a $6.1 million through Additional Financing (AF) Report No: PAD5405.

NaMEA, with the support of UNDP, conducted this monitoring to assess progress towards the PDO, identify implementation bottlenecks, and gather stakeholder feedback to inform corrective actions. The scope covered selected sub-components across eight districts due to data availability constraints and the vast geographic spread of the project.

2.2 Components and Targeted Beneficiaries

Before the monitoring exercise started, beneficiary data sourced from NaCSA indicated that a total of 60,611 beneficiaries were targeted and registered for the various sub-components of the project.

The Table below gives the number of targeted and registered beneficiaries for each of the project sub-components that were monitored.

Table 1: Project Sub-Components and Number of Beneficiaries

Sub-Component	Number of Beneficiaries
1A: SSN AGED Cash Transfers	35,005
2A: Sustainable Cash for Work (SCfW)	3,000
2B: Green Public Works (GPW)	3,000
3A: Youth-Led Household Enterprises	8,000
3B: IT Platform (MOYA)	
4A & 4B: Institutional Capacity	
5: CERC (ECT III)	11,606
TOTAL	**60,611**

3 Methodology

3.1 Sampling Method

Given the nationwide coverage and multi-component nature of the Productive Social Safety Net and Youth Employment (PSSNYE) Project, a **multi-stage mixed sampling approach** was adopted to ensure balanced representation of project interventions, districts, towns, and beneficiary categories across Sierra Leone. At the first stage, **purposive sampling** was used to select project sub-components and districts, prioritizing those with smaller implementation footprints to ensure coverage across diverse geographic regions. For instance, the Sustainable Cash for Work (SCfW) sub-component 2A (implemented in only three districts) was represented by two purposively selected districts, one from the northern region (Tonkolili) and another from the southern region (Pujehun). Similarly, **regional stratified purposive sampling** guided the selection of City Councils for the Green Public Works (GPW) sub-component 2B, covering all five regional headquarters (Port Loko, Makeni, Bo, Kenema, and Freetown, although the latter was later excluded due to the unavailability of beneficiary data). Additional towns such as Kailahun and Pendembu were included through **proximity-based convenience sampling** to maximize coverage within logistical constraints. Finally, within each selected town or community, **simple random sampling** (with varying sample sizes) was employed to select beneficiaries for interviews in the town/community where a subcomponent is implemented. This combination of purposive, stratified, convenience, and random sampling ensured both programmatic and regional representativeness while maintaining operational efficiency during field monitoring.

<u>Examples of Sampling Methods</u>

a) **Purposive Sampling** (Non-probability): Choosing subcomponents with the ***least number of districts*** (e.g., SCfW implemented in only 3 districts, of which two were picked). Selection was done on purpose (based on the criterion of "least number of districts" and regional balance), not randomly. The two SCfW farming communities visited, Masimra and Sahun, are also the pilot locations for the only two Childcare facilities currently established under the project.

b) **Regional stratified purposive sampling** (Non-Probability):
   - Moreover, two of the SCfW districts (Tonkolili and Falaba) are in the same region (north). Instead of selecting the two districts from the same regions (north), the purposive sampling focused on selecting one district from each of the two project regions of north and south – Pujehun District from the southern region, and Tonkolili District from the northern region. This means deliberately selecting

Tonkolili (northern region) and Pujehun Districts (southern region) from ***different regions*** for SCfW

- For the GPW cities, it was one each from the five regions to maximize regional coverage, and purposively to ensure geographic representation.

c) **Attempted census or complete coverage of key units (partial)**: ***All five regional headquarters (City Councils)*** for GPW (Freetown, Port Loko, Makeni, Bo, Kenema) were selected. In essence, this is a census of those five regional headquarters. However, Freetown was not monitored for GPW due to missing data, thus making this a partial census.

d) **Purposive or opportunistic expansion of components within selected clusters** (Non-probability): To maximize coverage, other sub-components implemented in the districts were selected for monitoring. Once a district was chosen, all subcomponents present were included.

e) **Convenience sampling based on proximity** (Non-probability): ***Kailahun (ECT III & SSN AGED) and Pendembu (SSN AGED)*** were included because of their proximity to Kenema GPW; this was influenced by logistical convenience.

f) **Random sampling of beneficiaries within selected towns/villages** (Probability): Once these towns were selected, beneficiary sample sizes were selected ***at random*** for that subcomponent in that town/village.

The table below shows the towns selected, the sub-components monitored, and the number of beneficiaries interviewed.

Table 2: KII With Beneficiaries Per Community for Component, Sub-Component Monitored

No	Town	District	Component & Sub-Components Monitored					
			1A SSN AGED	**2A ScFW**	**2B GPW**	**3A HH-Led**	**COMP 5: ECT 111**	**Total**
1	Port Loko	Port Loko	5	x	18	x	x	23
2	Old Maforki		9	x	x	x	x	9
3	Makeni	Bombali	10	x	21	x	x	31
4	Mangay Loko		20	x	x	x	x	20
5	Magburaka	Tonkolili	9	x	x	x	9	18
6	Masimra		x	6	x	x	x	6
7	Bo Aged	Bo	10	x	38	19	x	67
8	Boama New Town		15	x	x	x	x	15
9	Boama Old Town		15	x	x	x	x	15
10	Kenema	Kenema	x	x	23	x	x	23
11	Kailahun	Kailahun	10	x	x	x	24	34
12	Pendembu		14	x	x	x	x	14
13	Pujehun	Pujehun	x	x	x	x	26	26
14	Sahun		x	12	x	x	x	12
15	Freetown	West Urban	x	x	x	13	x	13
Total			**117**	**18**	**100**	**32**	**59**	**326**

x = Component/Sub-Component not monitored or not implemented in the town

Table 3: Beneficiaries Interviewed by Component and Location/District

#	District	# of Towns	List of Towns	Number of Beneficiaries Interviewed					
				Sub-Comp 1A: SSN AGED	Sub-Comp 2A: SCfW	Sub-Comp 2B: GPW	Sub-Comp 3A: HH-Led	Comp 5: CERC – ECT III	TOTAL
1	P. Loko	2	P/Loko, Old Maforki	14	X	18	X	X	32
2	Bombali	2	Makeni, Mangay Loko	30	X	21	X	X	51
3	Tonkolili	2	Magburaka, Masimra	9	6	X	X	9	24
4	Bo	3	Bo, Baoma I, Baoma II	40	X	38	19	X	97
5	Kailahun	2	Kailahun, Pendembu	24	X	X	X	24	48
6	Kenema	1	Kenema	X	X	23	X	X	23
7	Pujehun	2	Pujehun, Sahun	X	12	X	X	26	38
8	West Urban	1	Freetown	X	X	X	13	X	13
TOTAL		**15**		**117**	**18**	**100**	**32**	**59**	**326**

3.2 Data Collection

A mixed-methods approach was employed to gather quantitative and qualitative data:

- **Desk Review:** Analysis of project documents and beneficiary data provided by NaCSA.
- **Implementing Partners Key Informant Interviews (KIIs):** 19 interviews with 7 sets of implementing partners (NaCSA HQ & Districts, City Councils, NaYCOM, MOYA, ACC, NCPWD, SLUDI, and training service providers).
- **Beneficiary Key Informant Interviews:** 326 structured interviews with beneficiaries across all monitored sub-components in 15 cities, towns, and villages.
- **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):** Discussions with farming groups (SCfW) and cash transfer beneficiaries.
- **Field Observations:** Visits to project sites, including farms, childcare centers, GPW locations, and training facilities.

Table 4: Summary of Monitored Sub-Components and Data Collection

Sub-Component	Monitored	Method	No. of KIIs/Beneficiaries
1A: SSN AGED Cash Transfers	Yes	Beneficiary KIIs, NaCSA KIIs	117 Beneficiaries, 8 NaCSA
2A: Sustainable Cash for Work (SCfW)	Yes	Beneficiary KIIs, FGDs, NaCSA KIIs	18 Beneficiaries, 2 FGDs, 8 NaCSA
2B: Green Public Works (GPW)	Yes	Beneficiary KIIs, City Council KIIs	100 Beneficiaries, 4 Councils
3A: Youth-Led Household Enterprises	Yes	Beneficiary KIIs, NaYCOM KII, Trainer KIIs	32 Beneficiaries, 1 NaYCOM, 2 Trainers
3B: IT Platform (MOYA)	Yes	MOYA KII	1 MOYA
4A & 4B: Institutional Capacity	Partial	ACC KII, PWD Institutions KII	1 ACC, 2 PWD Institutions
5: CERC (ECT III)	Yes	Beneficiary KIIs, NaCSA KIIs	59 Beneficiaries, NaCSA Districts

Questionnaires were administered to the following implementing partners: 7 NaCSA District Coordinators, 4 City Councils; National Youth Commission (NaYCOM); CEDA-SL and CAC Holdings & AIDE Consortium – both are Trainers of Youth-Led Household Enterprises; Ministry of Youth Affairs (MOYA); the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC); National Commission for Persons with Disability (NCPWD) and the Sierra Leone Union of Displaced Individuals (SLUDI) (on disability issues).

See Annex 2 for detailed sampling methodology and sample size justification.

4 Key Findings: Project Performance and Challenges

This section discusses the project performance and challenges presented along the components that have been monitored. The findings reveal that while initiatives for job creation and youth support show notable progress and high demand, the social safety net programs appear to be challenging due to flaws in payment systems, data management, and inclusion.

4.1 Component 1 & 5: Social Safety Nets & Emergency Cash Transfers

Progress: The sub-components are being implemented: 1A (Social Safety Net for the AGED Cash Transfer), providing critical income support – quarterly payment of the equivalent of $45 to the AGED (60 years and above) (11,606 beneficiaries), and sub-component 1B (Economic Inclusion) is just starting. Component 5: Contingency Emergency Response Component (CERC) is being implemented as Emergency Cash Transfer (ECT III) support, a one-off NLe2,600 payment to 35,005 beneficiaries (elderly headed households, female headed households and households with person with disability). The beneficiary data provided by NaCSA shows that Female inclusion targets are being met (84.26% are female beneficiaries), while that for sub-component 1A SSN AGED shows 63.23% female beneficiaries.

Challenges:

- **Payment Delays and Irregularities:** Beneficiaries reported inconsistent and delayed payment schedules, causing changes in their household livelihood plans in anticipation of receipt of cash. *For some beneficiaries who did not receive the cash, it was like a dream to come true that never came. Amongst these beneficiaries, this has contributed to the erosion of trust in the program. At the initial stages, some aged beneficiaries, misled by misinformation or doubting the Government's intent, did not believe free cash support would ever be provided. Some discarded their SIM cards, convinced the initiative was not genuine. Others, facing payment delays, undervalued their benefits and exchanged their SIM cards for small amounts of cash in advance. When payments were eventually made in full, these individuals deeply regretted their earlier actions.*
- **Faulty Electronic Payment System:** The SIM card-based system is ill-suited for the target population. Widespread issues include lost/stolen cards, inability to remember or change PINs, and unauthorized deductions by some mobile money agents. *Due to low literacy levels, many aged beneficiaries were reluctant to change the default SIM card codes, fearing they would forget new ones. As a result, the default codes became widely known, exposing SIM cards to theft. Relatives and acquaintances could easily take the SIM cards, insert them into their own phones, and withdraw the beneficiaries' cash transfers*

without consent. Even though photo verification was deployed during registration and verification and issuance of SIM cards, there was no photo verification during cash-out.

- **Inaccurate Beneficiary Data:** The monitoring found numerous errors in the registry, including mislocated beneficiaries, interchange of Household IDs (ID on beneficiary data is different from the ID on the hardcopy of the individual's registration document, and incorrect data (e.g., beneficiaries listed as 1 year old, addresses listed as *"999999999"; ,By The School; ?ï¿½mmilah; ?immilah*) which do not refer to any coding system but mere inputting error in the addresses.
- **Weak Grievance Redress:** Mechanisms for reporting and resolving issues like lost SIMs or non-payment are ineffective and slow, further contaminating trust.

Despite these systemic issues, the critical importance of these cash transfers was starkly illustrated during the World Food Day programme in Pujehun on October 16, 2023 which coincided with ECT III alert. A large number of ECT III beneficiaries in the crowd received mobile alerts confirming their payments. This triggered a rush as the beneficiaries hurriedly left the field to the town barrie to cash out. This incidence, while non-disruptive, was a powerful testament to the desperate need for and immediate impact of these funds when they finally arrive.

4.2 Component 2: Productive Labor-Intensive Public Works

Progress: Both the sub-component 2A – Sustainable Cash for Work (SCfW) and sub-component 2B – Green Public Works (GPW) sub-components are highly appreciated. SCfW has created rural jobs, developed agriculture, and built childcare facilities. GPW has improved urban cleanliness, provided short-term jobs, and fostered community cohesion and peace.

Challenges:

- **Payment Delays:** Salaries for work completed are often delayed for both beneficiaries and administrative cost for Farming Group Committees.
- **Inadequate Tools and Safety Gear:** A shortage of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for GPW workers as prescribed in the project appraisal document (PAD) and insufficient farming tools for SCfW groups pose safety risks and reduces efficiency.
- **Low PWD Participation:** PWD participation is low (SCfW: 3.27%, GPW: 1.6%), far below inclusion targets of 15%, as evidenced by the beneficiary data from NaCSA and from training service providers in Freetown and Bo for sub-component 3A – Support to Youth-Led Household Enterprises.

- **Short Employment Duration:** GPW beneficiaries express a strong desire for longer employment periods. **This is driven by the profound positive impact of the earnings.** Beneficiaries reported using their GPW income to expand small businesses, acquire plots of land for housing, and pay university tuition fees for their children. However, this success breeds anxiety about sustainability; one parent who managed to pay first-term university fees is now anxious about how to finance subsequent terms. Beneficiaries collectively appeal for an extension of the GPW employment period to prevent disruptions in their livelihoods and household income as one female GPW beneficiary puts it *"I am grateful for the opportunity to participate as a beneficiary in the GPW activity in Bo City. Through the project, I received financial support that enabled me to pay my child's second semester college fees, something I could not have managed on my own. However, now that my participation in the projects has ended, I am concerned about how I will be able to afford the fees for the next semester,"*. While the GPW is in high demand in the urban areas, the strengthening and expansion of the SCfW (and the Economic Inclusion) sub-components in rural areas is also attracting the rural youth. These sub-components can be new social impetuses for them to stay in their communities, and help reduce urban migration.

4.3 Component 3: Employment and Entrepreneurship Support for Youth

Progress: The Youth-Led Enterprises sub-component (3A) is underway, with training delivered to 857 and 953 youth in Freetown and Bo respectively. The prototype of the IT Platform (subcomponent 3B), as informed by the implementing partner (MOYA) in their response to the questionnaire, is complete, and is awaiting World Bank approval. The secondary data (for sub-component 3A) from the training institutions and NaYCOM show a strong gender inclusivity (above the 60% female target) has been achieved in the youth-led household enterprise (80% in Freetown and 70% in Bo).

Challenges:

- **Delayed Grant Disbursement:** Grants of $300 for trained youth entrepreneurs have not yet been disbursed, creating apprehension and risking loss of momentum. However, NaYCOM reported that completion of training (a 22-day period) is not immediately followed by payment of the grant. It requires banking protocols to open bank accounts for the beneficiaries.

- **Low PWD Turnout:** Training providers reported difficulty in attracting PWD participants (reporting 0% in Freetown and 1% in Bo).

- **Inclement Weather:** Training during the rainy season affected attendance. The rain compels participants to take fare-paying means of transportation which beneficiaries reported they hardly can afford.
- **IT Platform for Youth Employability:** The IT Platform may be challenged by financial sustainability and post-platform development technical support because these are not provided for in the project.
- **Market Realities:** Beneficiaries are concerned about market competition and the adequacy of the $300 start-up capital. They consider the amount to be inadequate, based on their current pricing experience in the market.

4.4 Component 4: Institutional Strengthening and Cross-Cutting Themes

Coordination with PWD Institutions (NCPWD & SLUDI):

- **Finding:** Coordination and engagement between NaCSA and the PWD institutions seem to be weak. Both NCPWD and SLUDI reported being sidelined despite their mandate and expertise. Though the project is clear on the need for collaboration between NaCSA and PWD institutions (NCPWD and SLUDI), the PWD institutions reported a lukewarm system of formal collaboration.
- **Impact:** The institutions advocate for their participation/inclusion, emphasizing that direct targeting through their networks is more effective than household surveys for identifying PWDs. An executive member of NCPWD is quoted saying *"There is nothing about us, without us."*

Role of Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC):

- **Finding:** As reported from the field, generally, though not 100% elimination of malpractices, the mere presence of ACC serves as a deterrent to corruption. However, the Commission lacks logistical support (vehicles, bikes) for effective monitoring during targeting and payment to beneficiaries. The ACC Monitors at chiefdom level, for instance, move within remote rural communities during these exercises.

Implementing Partner Capacity (NaCSA Districts & City Councils):

- **Finding:** District offices and councils reproted being under-resourced, facing challenges with logistics, fuel, and office resources. This impedes their ability to monitor projects, support beneficiaries, and resolve issues promptly.

4.5 Overall Progress Towards Project Development Objective (PDO)

The project's overall performance differs across its two primary goals:

- **Improved Access to Income Generating Opportunities:** Some components of the project are making **notable progress**. Components 2A, 2B, and 3A are directly creating jobs, improving earnings/incomes and building skills. Despite issues with delays in beneficiary payments and supplies of materials, there is clear beneficiary satisfaction and a strong demand for these interventions, especially the desire for extended work periods in GPW and the continuation of the SCfW.
- **Improved Access to Social Safety Nets:** This component is **relatively underperforming**. Components 1A and 5 are not consistent in providing reliable, predictable safety nets. Systemic challenges in payment delivery, data credibility and management, and grievance redress mean that the most vulnerable beneficiaries cannot consistently access the support they are entitled to, undermining the very core of the SSN objective.

5 Limitations

- **Sample Size**: The sample size for each of the components/sub-components being monitored is small relative to the total beneficiary population of that component/sub-component. For instance, the targeted number of beneficiaries for Sub-Component 1A – SSN AGED is 11,606, and 117 beneficiaries (1%) were subjected to KIIs; of the 3,000 beneficiaries for sub-component 2A – SCfW in rural areas, 12 beneficiaries (0.6%) were interviewed using KII; and for sub-component 2B – GPW in urban areas, 100 out of 3,000 beneficiaries (3.3%) were interviewed. The total number of 326 beneficiaries physically reached and interviewed from the more than 54,000 beneficiaries (0.6%) across sub-components all over the country, limited the overall coverage to 0.6%.

- **Bias: Potential sampling bias exists as monitoring included a level of convenience based on accessible project sites within a limited timeframe.**

- **Non-availability of data**: Data was unavailable for sub-components 1B (Economic Inclusion), 2C (Digital Public Works), and 2B (GPW for Freetown City Council), restricting the scope of monitoring. At the time of monitoring, all these sub-components were at various stages of implementation, with GPW in Freetown being implemented more than three months earlier. Beneficiaries for the Economic Inclusion had been selected and were organized into groups and assisted with group dynamics, such as developing byelaws, as reported in Kenema and Pujehun NaCSA offices. On the other hand, the implementation of the DPW had not started at the time of monitoring.

- **Non-Implementation**: SPRINT (Social Protection Registry for Integrated National Targeting) was not accessed because it was still under construction.

- **Delay as a Constraint**: Access to beneficiary data was delayed by almost three weeks, pending the signing of an MoU between NaCSA and NaMEA, notwithstanding the provisions of Article 13 of the NaMEA Act, 2024. This delay consequently limited the timeliness of the early start of the monitoring exercise.

- **Slow Response**: Conspicuously absent in the report is the perspectives of NaCSA project lead. As part of the data collection process, NaMEA shared questionnaires with all key project participants, including the Project Coordinator at NaCSA headquarters. Several attempts to have this questionnaire completed and returned did not produce response. Additionally, a feedback session was held on Friday, September 26, 2025, where senior PSSNYE project staff from NaCSA were expected to attend. However, a representation from NaSCA, primarily consisting of three Community Development Officers and an

M&E Officer attended the session. These officials were briefed to provide tangible feedback on the findings to the NaCSA PSSNYE project leadership. This limited NaCSA headquarter input into the report.

- Similarly, the Freetown City Council did not respond to the questionnaires shared with them.

6 Conclusion

The PSSNYE project stands at a crossroad, with "findings that have indicated that the project is entering a decisive phase, where addressing identified operational gaps will be critical to achieving intended outcomes."

Its initiatives for job creation and youth entrepreneurship are demonstrating positive results and strong community demand. However, its challenges to reliably deliver social safety nets limit its overall legitimacy and developmental impact.

The pathway to success requires decisive leadership and a commitment to addressing fundamental operational challenges. The findings of this report suggest that a strategic reconsideration of the project's architecture may be necessary. The complex and distinct challenges of delivering reliable social safety nets versus facilitating income-generating opportunities indicate that separating these two sectors into distinct projects or implementation streams could make delivery less complex, simpler to manage, and more effective in addressing the unique challenges of each sector.

7 Recommendations

The recommendations are organized thematically and further stratified into a matrix outlining immediate, short-term, and medium-to-long-term actions.

1. Improve Beneficiary Data Management and Targeting

Actions:

- Conduct an immediate, comprehensive data audit and validation exercise of the entire beneficiary registry and update incorrect data.
- Improve data quality by collecting precise biographic (name, age, sex) and geographic (specific chiefdoms, towns, villages) details, moving beyond vague "***community/locality***" labels.

2. Reform the Payment Delivery System for Social Safety Nets

Actions:

- Immediately resolve all outstanding cases of non-payment (for SCfW beneficiaries as well) and blocked SIM cards for SSN.
- Investigate and transition to a more accessible, secure, and beneficiary-friendly payment mechanism suitable for the aged and less literate populations, addressing the vulnerabilities of the current SIM-card system.
- Ensure all cases of non-payment are investigated, resolved transparently, and outcomes communicated to stakeholders to rebuild trust.

3. Ensure Timely and Predictable Disbursements

Actions:

- Expedite the release of all owed funds to implementing partners (City Councils, trainers), administrative cost for farming group executive committees, and beneficiaries.
- Partners should be aware of the World Bank "No Objection" regulations and improve on their levels of implementation to eliminate delays in approvals and fund disbursement that affect timely implementation.

4. Mainstream Inclusion and Strengthen Partnerships for Sustainability

Actions:

- Immediately formalize collaboration with local councils and PWD institutions (NCPWD, SLUDI) through signed Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) to define roles, data collection and sharing, and joint-PWD targeting strategies to improve the accuracy of targeting for other vulnerable groups and Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) respectively.
- Launch targeted registration drives for PWDs using Disabled Persons Organizations (DPOs) and allocate specific budgets for disability-inclusion across all components.
- Institutionalize successful interventions for long-term sustainability (e.g., integrate Green Public Works into council operations and budgets, ensure PWD access to benefits beyond the project cycle).

5. Enhance Implementation Capacity and Accountability

Actions:

- As part of Component 4, the project through NaCSA should provide adequate and predictable financial and logistical resources (vehicles, fuel, office resources) to NaCSA district offices and to City Councils to enable effective monitoring and support.
- Procure and distribute sufficient Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and quality work tools to all active sites of SCfW and GPW groups to ensure safety and efficiency.
- Despite current efforts in minimising grievances, strengthen Grievance Redress Mechanisms (GRMs) to make them more responsive, effective, and widely known, ensuring all issues (especially the non-payment of beneficiaries with Orange Mobile Company) are resolved conclusively and quickly.

6. Bridge Short-Term Support with Long-Term Resilience

Actions:

- Provide clear communication to beneficiaries on program benefits, timelines, and processes so as to manage expectations.
- Extend the duration of short-term employment programs (like GPW) where feasible and link participants to longer-term resilience building or sustainable livelihood support.
- Enhance project implementing staff capacity through targeted training and mentorship programs; and for beneficiaries, particularly for youth entrepreneurship, to improve

outcomes beyond the initial grant or training period, because beneficiaries and training institutions consider the 22-day training period to be short.

7. Strategic Program Design

Actions:

- Consider separating the complex implementation of Social Safety Nets and Income Generating Opportunities into two distinct projects or streams within NaCSA to allow for more focused management, simpler procedures, and more effective challenge resolution tailored to each sector's unique needs.

8. For Social Safety Nets, success depends on a fundamental overhaul focused on:

Actions:

- *Data Integrity:* Improving the quality of beneficiary data with accurate biographic and geographic details.
- *Payment Accessibility:* Changing the electronic payment mechanism to one that is more suitable for the aged and less literate population.
- *Trust and Accountability:* Drastically shortening and making conclusive the grievance redress process.

9. For Income Generating Opportunities, the focus must be on enhancing and scaling the evident progress by:

Actions:

- *Clear Communication:* Delivering clearer information to beneficiaries about program benefits and delivery mechanisms.
- *Timely Support:* Improving the provision of adequate tools, materials, and, most critically, timely payments.
- *Inclusive Growth:* Improving coordination with PWD institutions to achieve inclusion targets and ensure benefits reach all intended youth.

By prioritizing these actions, formally partnering with specialized institutions for inclusion, and strengthening the capacity of implementing partners, the project can fulfil its objectives.

Table 5: Recommendations matrix stratified by timing of implementation

Key Challenge	Immediate (0-3 months)	Short Term (3-6 months)	Medium to Long Term (6-12+ months)
SSN Payment Delays & SIM Issues	Resolve all verified cases of non-payment and blocked SIMs.	Strengthen GRM for faster resolution. Explore alternative payment mechanisms for the aged/less literate.	Institutionalize a robust, beneficiary-friendly payment system.
Low PWD Inclusion	Sign an MOU with NCPWD and SLUDI to formalize roles and data sharing.	Launch targeted registration drives using DPOs. Allocate specific budgets for disability inclusion.	Mainstream disability inclusion into all NaCSA operations.
Inaccurate Beneficiary Data	Initiate a data audit in the most problematic districts; and identify sources of discrepancies	Update and validate the entire beneficiary registry.	Integrate systems with NCPWD and local council registries, and integrate with SPRINT
Delayed Fund Disbursement	Expedite release of owed funds to councils, trainers, and beneficiaries.	Streamline for faster "No Objection" and fund transfer processes with the World Bank.	Review and simplify financial management procedures.
Insufficient PPE/Tools.	Procure and distribute quality and enough basic PPE for all active GPW sites.	Ensure tools/PPE are included in all future procurement plans and expedite procurement.	Integrate GPW into council budgets for sustainable funding.

8 Addendum: Exit Meeting with NaCSA

Monitoring Report on the Productive Social Safety Nets and Youth Employment (PSSNYE) Project

Following the completion of field monitoring activities for the PSSNYE Project, the draft monitoring report was shared with the National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA) and key implementing partners for review, input and validation. Feedback received was duly incorporated, and the revised draft was re-submitted to NaCSA.

Subsequently, at NaCSA's request, an Exit Meeting was convened, involving the National Monitoring and Evaluation Agency (NaMEA) and implementing partners to finalize outstanding issues and validate the report. Notably, additional information that had been requested during the monitoring phase was provided approximately six (6) months after the completion of fieldwork, and the final draft report had already been prepared and shared.

In view of the delayed submission of this information, it was agreed that the outcomes of the Exit Meeting would be documented as an addendum to the main monitoring report, rather than integrated into the core report.

8.1 Key Issues Discussed and Clarifications Provided

8.1.1 Sampling Methodology and Sample Size Determination

NaCSA expressed concern that the sample sizes applied across the various sub-components were relatively small and, as such, may not be sufficiently representative.

NaMEA clarified that the monitoring report contains a comprehensive methodological justification for the sample sizes adopted across all sub-components. Given that all sub-components were monitored concurrently, and considering the substantial total beneficiary population of 52,611 (GPW = 3,000; SCfW = 3,000; ECT III = 11,606; AGED SSN = 35,005; Total = 52,611), a full census approach was neither feasible nor methodologically necessary.

The determination of sample sizes was influenced by several operational and methodological factors, including:

a) Variations in sub-component objectives, indicators, and variables
b) Geographic dispersion of beneficiaries across districts and communities
c) Co-location of interventions
d) Limited duration of fieldwork
e) Availability of monitoring personnel

Accordingly, a multi-factor, pragmatic sampling approach was adopted to ensure adequate representation across sub-components, regions, and beneficiary categories, while maintaining operational feasibility.

8.1.2 Low Representation of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs)

The monitoring findings highlighted a low proportion of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) among project beneficiaries. This observation is consistent with the relatively low PWD targeting thresholds outlined in the project design. NaCSA further indicated that Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) were not explicitly targeted through proactive identification and registration processes. Instead, the approach adopted was as follows:

a) A self-targeting mechanism, whereby PWDs voluntarily present themselves to benefit from specific programme interventions;
b) Under ECT III, PWDs were only registered if they were members of households already identified as eligible beneficiaries

However, consultations with PWD-focused institutions further indicated limited engagement with these stakeholders during project implementation. In response, NaCSA acknowledged the low representation but clarified that the Project Implementation Manual (PIM) adopts a self-targeting approach. Under this approach, PWDs are not proactively targeted but are included if they fall within eligible households identified through the targeting process.

While this approach aligns with the PIM, the findings suggest the need for more deliberate inclusion strategies to enhance the participation of vulnerable groups such as PWDs.

8.1.3 E-Payment System for Cash Transfers

The monitoring report found that the electronic payment (e-payment) system for cash transfers is not well-suited to AGED and ECT III beneficiary groups.

Notwithstanding this finding, NaCSA informed the meeting that the project implemented an electronic payment (e-payment) system for cash transfers, consistent with global best practices and aligned with commitments under the Marrakesh Declaration on e-Payment for Cash Transfers. This framework promotes a transition from manual cash disbursement to secure, transparent, and efficient digital payment systems.

Despite its advantages, the monitoring identified several implementation challenges:

a) ***Verification gaps:*** E-payment agents lack access to beneficiary photographs within the system, limiting their ability to verify the identity of recipients at cash-out points.
b) ***Infrastructure limitations:*** There is inadequate digital infrastructure, particularly in rural areas, affecting network reliability and system functionality.
c) ***Digital literacy constraints:*** A significant proportion of beneficiaries lack the capacity to operate mobile phones or digital payment platforms.
d) ***Affordability issues:*** Some beneficiaries are unable to afford mobile devices required for accessing e-payment services.

These constraints undermine the effectiveness of the e-payment system in achieving its intended objective of improving access to social safety nets.

The report therefore recommends that, while maintaining alignment with international policy commitments, context-appropriate and flexible payment modalities should be considered for vulnerable populations who are unable to effectively utilize digital systems.

NaMEA should engage with Government to provide further justification for the continued use of manual cash disbursement, or to consider alternative payment modalities in contexts where e-transfers are ineffective.

8.1.4 Non-Payment of Registered Beneficiaries

The monitoring exercise identified instances where registered beneficiaries, whose names appeared on official beneficiary lists and who presented valid identification and verification slips, did not receive their payments.

While acknowledging the identified instances, NaCSA maintained that the sample size used during the monitoring exercise does not provide sufficient evidence to conclude that the issue is widespread.

Reported reasons included:

a) Blocked SIM cards
b) Absence of payment notifications

While NaCSA indicated that such cases were statistically insignificant relative to the sample size, this position was considered inadequate from a rights-based and program integrity perspective. Social protection programmes are expected to ensure that ***all eligible beneficiaries receive their entitlements without exception***.

The report therefore emphasizes that:

a) Even isolated cases of non-payment represent critical service delivery failures
b) Such cases require systematic investigation and resolution

It is recommended that NaCSA, in collaboration with the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), continues investigations into these cases and implements corrective measures to ensure that all verified beneficiaries receive their due payments in a timely and transparent manner.

8.2 Conclusion

This addendum captures key clarifications, additional information, and deliberations arising from the Exit Meeting held after the completion of the PSSNYE monitoring exercise. While the main report reflects findings based on field evidence collected during the monitoring period, this addendum provides supplementary context and stakeholder responses received post-monitoring.

The issues highlighted reinforce the need for strengthened implementation systems, enhanced inclusivity, and context-sensitive approaches to programme delivery to ensure that the PSSNYE Project achieves its intended development outcomes.

9 Annexes

9.1 Annex 1_Sampling Methodology and Sample Size

9.2 Annex 2_Data Collection Instruments

9.3 Annex 3_List of Stakeholders Interviewed

9.4 Annex 4_Summary of Responses from KIIs with Stakeholders and FGDs

9.5 Annex 5_Field Visit Evidence

9.6 Annex 6_Beneficial Data Table, Data Queries and Non-Payments

9.7 Annex 7_Financial and Disbursement Table

9.8 Annex 8_Addendum – Exit Meeting