



Economic Recovery from Ebola for Liberia (EREL) Program
Funded by USAID/ Food for Peace (FFP)
Fiscal Year 2016 Quarter 3 Report
April 1 –June 30, 2016



I. Program Overview

The Economic Recovery from Ebola for Liberia (EREL) program is designed to assist 30,000 households (150,000 individuals) who have been economically affected by the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) outbreak in Liberia. The EREL program targets three of the most affected counties – Lofa, Montserrado and Margibi, which represent the counties through which Ebola first entered Liberia, and the counties that have suffered some of the most recent and recurrent outbreaks. The program is assisting vulnerable populations in these counties to fill minimum food basket gaps, maintain normal agricultural production, protect vulnerable households' assets from depletion through sales and minimize the negative impacts on child nutrition. The project consists of two components: 1) direct cash transfers to the most vulnerable households; and 2) agricultural input vouchers targeting vulnerable households that contain smallholder farmers. At the end of the EREL program, each beneficiary household will have received a total of \$252 USD split over six tranches, which equals \$42 USD per tranche. Among the 30,000 households, 10,000 small-holder farming households will benefit from agricultural inputs valued at \$ 60 USD. Direct cash transfers to beneficiaries are unconditional while the receipt of agricultural inputs is conditional to participating in basic agronomic best practice training.

II. Quarter Executive Summary

A. Overall Summary

During this quarter, April-June 2016, the EREL program made significant progress towards its expected results, particularly with an increased number of beneficiaries compared to previous quarters. Our registration records show that 28,307 households had been registered by end of the quarter. Cumulatively, the EREL program had provided at least one tranche of cash transfers to 21,752 households (108,760 individuals) in the three counties as follows: Margibi County: 7,020 households (35,100 individuals); Montserrado County: 7,554 (37,770 individuals); and Lofa County: 7,178 (35,890 individuals). By the end of the quarter, 9,978 households (49,890 individuals) had received five tranches of cash transfers out of the expected six tranches of cash transfers. An additional 2,401 farming households received vouchers for the first time and exchanged them for agricultural inputs at trade fairs held in Margibi, Lofa and Montserrado counties. The cumulative number of households that have received at least three vouchers is now 8,237 farming households.

During the quarter, the team conducted post-distribution monitoring and follow-up regarding household dietary diversity, and conducted household hunger surveys to document potential changes from the baseline period. The post-distribution findings indicated that cash enabled beneficiaries to meet both food and other basic needs including health and education. The household hunger survey, conducted primarily among new beneficiaries, revealed that the beneficiaries are less hungry than during the baseline period (March 2016). Findings of the dietary diversity survey also showed that more beneficiaries have highly diversified diets as compared to the baseline period, due to increased awareness created by the program.

B. Security Context, Situation Overview and Operational Summary

The quarter witnessed a huge draw down in the presence of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) with a handover to the Liberia security apparatus, which includes the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL), the Liberia National Police (LNP), and the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization (BIN). Though there remains great uncertainty among a large proportion of the Liberian society as to the country's ability to sustain peace and security, UNMIL and the government are confident that the Liberian security forces can maintain and

improve on the level of peace, tranquility and security attained in the country so far. There have been no reports of major security incidences so far since the draw-down of UNMIL.

Additionally, there have been no reports of new outbreaks of EVD in the country since the last case was reported in April 2016. In the meantime, the rainy season is active with heavy downpours, which often result in floods that damage roads and bridges and make travel uncertain, even on the few paved roads in the country. This is posing challenges to our ability to access many beneficiary communities, particularly in the rural parts of the country.

III. Operations

Mercy Corps continues to fully operate its country office in Monrovia with four active programs. The EREL Monrovia-based team oversees operations in Montserrado and Margibi counties, while the team based in Voinjama services Lofa County.

IV. Coordination

National-level coordination

Mercy Corps continues to actively participate in the Cash Transfer Working Group and Food Security Cluster in Monrovia. We are also coordinating with county, district and local officials in the field. However, due to the fact that most EFSP programs implemented by other agencies are finishing up or have already ended, there are less frequent meetings of the Cash Transfer Working Group. However, the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection continues to provide leadership to cash transfer programs in the country. The Food Security Technical Working Group has also reduced the frequency of meetings, as Liberia continues to recover from the effects of EVD and emergency relief programs wind down. Mercy Corps is a member of the new Mobile Money subgroup of the Cash Transfer Working Group, which is coordinated by MStar.

County-level coordination

Mercy Corps and the EREL implementing partners participate in a number of coordination meetings at the county level. In Margibi County, the team attends the social mobilization and the special tasks meetings. Both meetings foster coordination among partners working in development and humanitarian interventions in Margibi County. In Lofa County, the team attends the technical meeting, the partners/coordination meeting, the agriculture sector meeting, and the livelihoods and food security meeting. The discussions include deliberations on key achievements, coordination/operational challenges, and ways to remove challenges and improve coordination. Mercy Corps and its implementing partner also attend key coordination meetings in Montserrado.

V. Program Activities

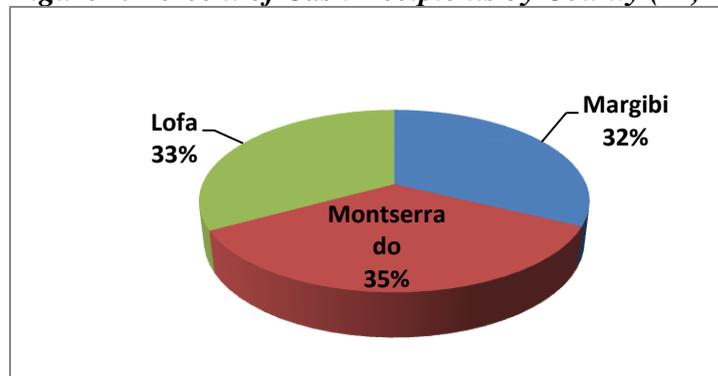
Objective 1: Most affected populations in Montserrado, Margibi and Lofa have access to enough food

Indicator 1.1: # of recipients of cash transfers

The EREL program continued its cash transfers to households directly and economically affected by the Ebola Virus Disease in Montserrado, Margibi and Lofa counties. By the end of the quarter (June 2016), 21,752 households (10, 8760 individuals) had received at least one cash transfer through the EREL program, as follows: Margibi County: 7,020 households (35,100 individuals); Montserrado County: 7,554 (37,770 individuals); and Lofa County:

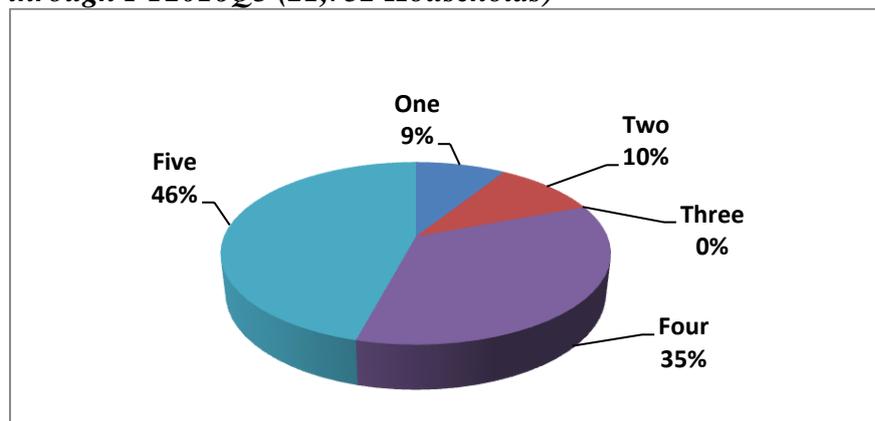
7,178 (35,890 individuals). Relative to disaggregation of household heads, female heads of household constituted 71% of the recipient households in Montserrado County. Similarly, female heads of household constituted 64% of the recipient households in Lofa County, while female heads of household constituted 73% of the recipient households Margibi County.

Figure I: Percent of Cash Recipients by County (21,752 households)



The program is on track and expects to reach its maximum number (30,000) by the next reporting quarter. The 21,752 recipient households are in different cycles/tranches, but none have received the sixth tranche yet.

Figure II: Cash Recipient Households by Number of Cash Transfer Tranches Received through FY2016Q3 (21,752 Households)



Distribution Cycle: Number of recipient households and tranches received through FY16Q3

	Tranche 1	Tranche 2	Tranche 3	Tranche 4	Tranche 5	Tranche 6
Montserrado	558	570	0	4,158	2,268	7,554
Margibi	724	1,356	0	2,954	1,986	7,020
Lofa	658	314	0	3,340	2,866	7,178
TOTALS	1,940	2,240	0	7,594	9,978	21,752

Those receiving first and second cash transfers are beneficiaries who were first targeted by the program in 2016, while those beneficiaries who received three or more tranches are beneficiaries targeted by the program at different periods in 2015.

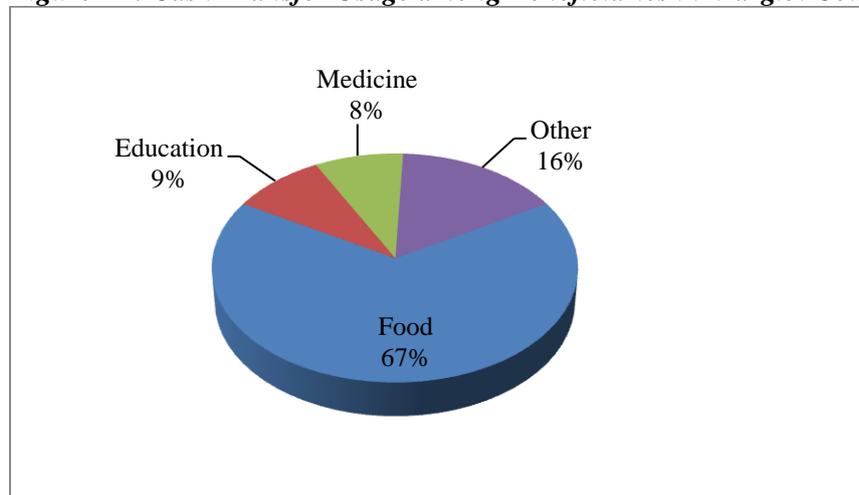
Indicator 1.2: Total value of cash transfers

The total amount of cash disbursed to program beneficiaries during this quarter was \$1,425,270 USD. The EREL program has disbursed a total of \$3,645,264 USD from May 2015 through the end of the reporting quarter. This amount disbursed so far constitutes 48.2% of the total amount budgeted for cash transfers to beneficiaries (\$7,560,000 USD). The percentage of cash distributed is expected to increase by the end of the next quarter to 75% of the total cash transfer budget. Therefore, the program is on track and expected to transfer the expected amount of cash by the end of the project.

Indicator 1.3: Usage of cash transfers

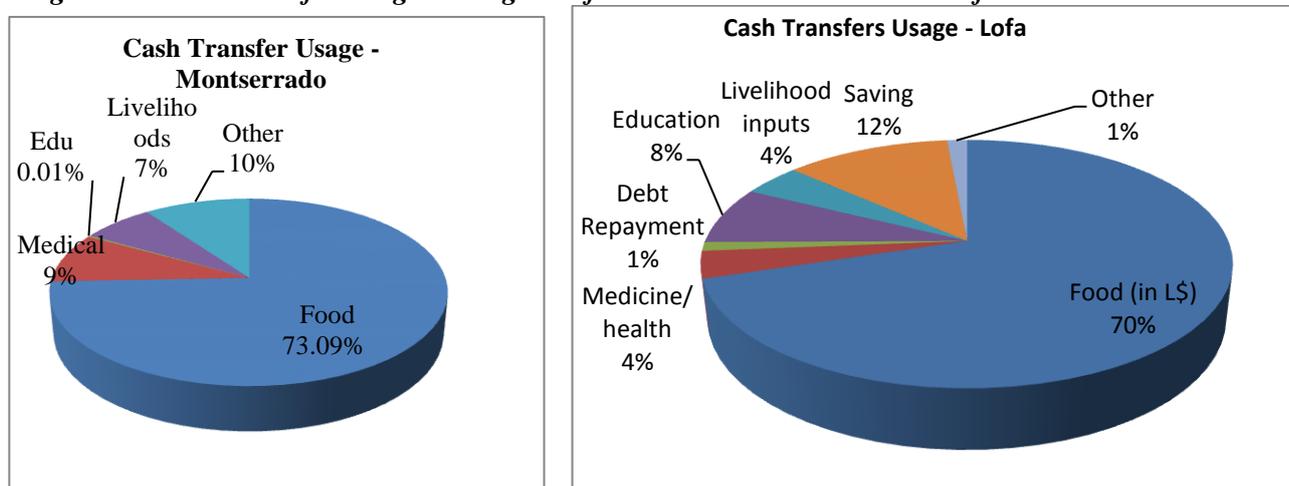
The EREL program conducted Post-Distribution Monitoring (PDM) among cash recipients to understand how households are utilizing or maximizing the cash assistance received. The PDM conducted in June 2016 targeted a total of 1,485 households: 573 households in Margibi County, 247 households in Lofa County and 665 households in Montserrado County. Data was analyzed at the county level.

Figure III: Cash Transfer Usage among Beneficiaries in Margibi County



The data showed that most of the cash received by households in Margibi County was spent on food (67%), followed by others such as gifts, clothes, etc. (16%), education (9%), and health (8%).

Figure IV: Cash Transfer Usage Among Beneficiaries in Montserrado and Lofa Counties

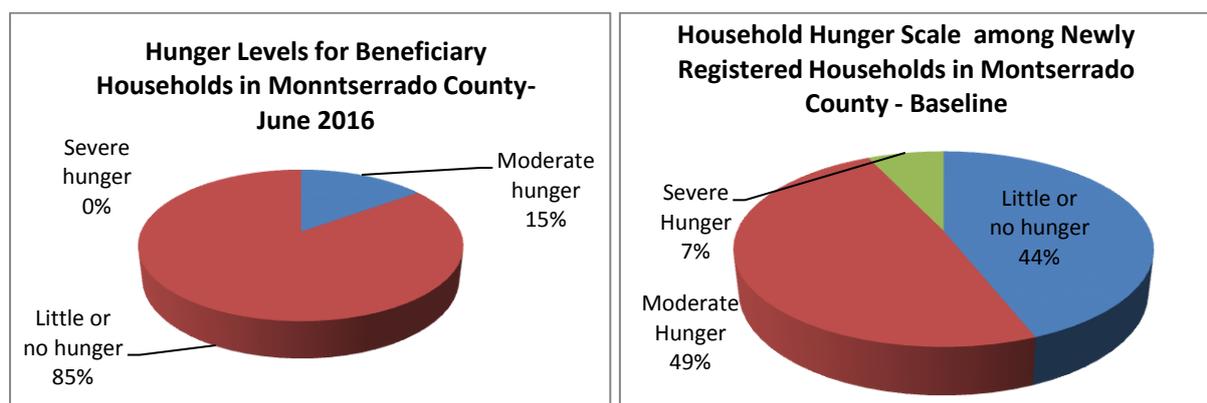


Analysis showed that households in Lofa and Montserrado Counties spent 70% and 73% of the cash they received on food, respectively. The data analysis also revealed that households in Lofa and Montserrado respectively invested 4% and 7% of their cash in initiatives that will improve their livelihoods. The data indicated that during the quarter, beneficiaries in Montserrado County spent very little of the cash they received on education (0.3%) while beneficiaries in Lofa spent 8% of the cash on education. Households in Montserrado spent a little more on health (9%) compared to households in Margibi County (8%). See Annexes I-III for Cash PDM reports.

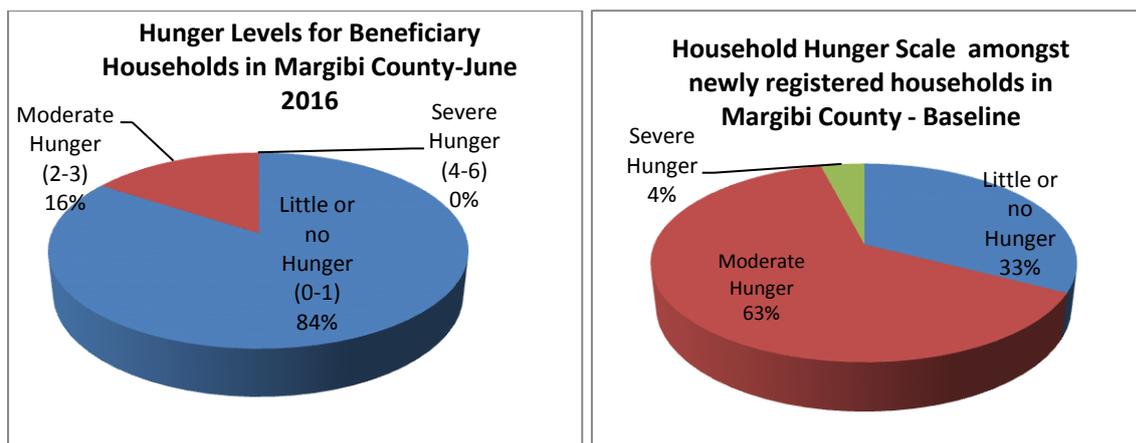
Indicator 1.4: Prevalence of moderate or severe hunger among participating households

The EREL program and its implementing partners conducted a follow-up household hunger and dietary diversity survey in June 2016 among beneficiaries in the three counties to understand and document any changes in their dietary diversity and hunger situation as compared to the baseline survey, conducted in March 2016. The follow-up survey in June 2016 primarily targeted beneficiaries interviewed during the baseline assessment.

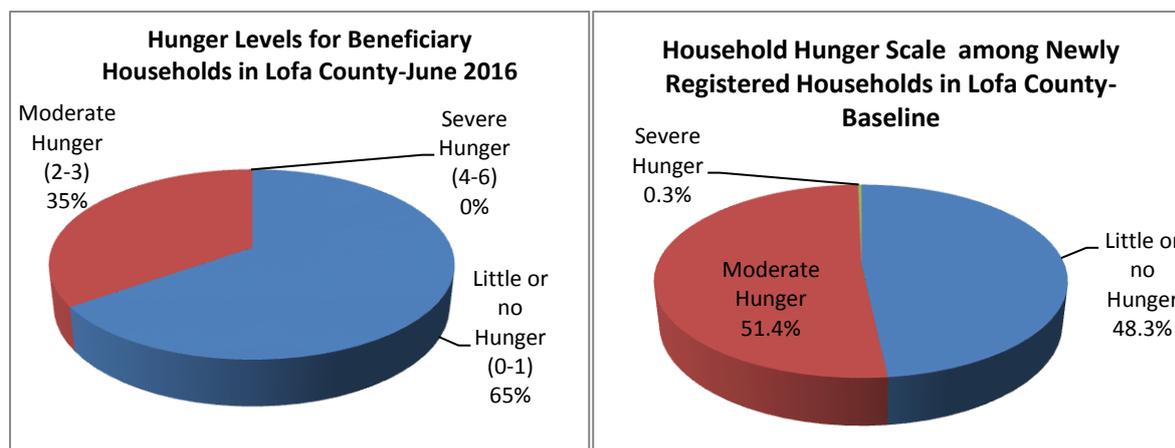
Findings from the follow-up household hunger survey, conducted among 303 beneficiaries, showed improvement in the hunger situation among project beneficiaries in all three counties compared to the baseline results. The follow-up hunger survey showed that no household surveyed had experienced severe hunger in the 30 days prior the interview. We believe that these improvements can primarily be attributed to the cash transfers received by the households.



The follow-up assessment showed that no household respondents in Montserrado County experienced severe hunger compared to the baseline survey period, where 7% of households in the county had experienced severe hunger. The follow-up survey also showed that 15% of households in Montserrado County experienced moderate hunger, compared to 49% during the baseline survey. This reduction in hunger reported is a result of the increase in the number of households experiencing no hunger (85% compared to 44% at baseline).



For Margibi County, the number of households experiencing severe hunger reduced from 4% at the baseline period to 0% in June 2016. The Number of households experiencing moderate hunger in Margibi significantly reduced from 63% during at baseline to 16% in June 2016. Additionally, the number of households experiencing little or no hunger has increased from 33% during the baseline period to 84% in June 2016.



Similarly, the number of households experiencing severe hunger in Lofa reduced from 0.3% at the baseline period to 0% in June 2016. The number of households experiencing moderate hunger in the county also reduced from 51.4% during the baseline to 35% in June 2016. Finally, the number of households experiencing little or no hunger has increased from 48.3% during the baseline period to 65% in June 2016. (See Annex IV for Household Hunger Score (HHS) and Household Dietary Diversity (HDD) reports.)

Indicator 1.5: Average Household Dietary Diversity Score (HDDS)

Follow-up HDDS data analysis showed improvements in the level of dietary diversity among beneficiaries compared to the baseline period. The results showed that households with low dietary diversity scores in Margibi County fell from 31.6% during the baseline period to 8% in June 2016, meaning fewer people consumed only 0-3 food groups. Montserrado County showed a very significant decrease in the number of households consuming only 0-3 food groups (i.e. low HDD) from 29.3% during the baseline to 0% in June 2016. Lofa County did not show a significant improvement in dietary diversity: the number of households with low dietary diversity dropped from 12.7 % during baseline to 10% in June 2016. Montserrado County was found the have the highest number of households with high dietary diversity (84%), followed by Lofa County (65%) and Margibi County (47%). The improvement in the

diversification of diets can be primarily attributed to the dietary diversity awareness created among beneficiaries by EREL and its implementing partners. (See Annex IV for HHS and HDD reports.)

Objective 2: Most affected farmers in Montserrado, Margibi and Lofa are able to maintain their production with improved inputs

Indicator 2.1: # of recipients of input vouchers

During the quarter under review, agricultural inputs fairs were held across the three project counties, reaching a total of 6,054 farming households as follows: (a) Margibi County: 2,427 farming households; (b) Montserrado County: 1,910 farming households; and Lofa County: 1,717 farming households. The agricultural inputs fairs were conducted in time to allow beneficiaries to sow their seeds for the season. To encourage farmers to grow more rice (Liberia's main staple), inputs were restricted to only rice seed. Beneficiaries overwhelmingly appreciated the restriction. Before the seeds were ever brought to the fairs, seed germination and purity tests were conducted by the program agronomists to ensure they are viable and pure. The agronomists have also conducted post-control tests and the results showed that the seeds are viable and grow well. During the fairs, each beneficiary household received two vouchers valued at \$10 USD each. The vouchers were exchanged with agricultural inputs vendors present at the fairs. Two more rounds of agricultural inputs trade fairs are scheduled for July and October 2016, at which time beneficiaries will receive the remainder of their six vouchers. The July and October distributions will include beneficiaries who have not received any vouchers up until now. A total of five agricultural inputs vendors participated in the agricultural inputs voucher trade fairs.

A total of 121.08 tons of rice seed were purchased with vouchers in the three counties during the agricultural inputs trade fairs.

Indicator 2.2: Total value of input vouchers

A total of 12,108 vouchers, each valued at \$10 USD, were distributed to beneficiaries and exchanged for agricultural inputs during the period. The total value of vouchers redeemed during the period is \$121,080 USD.

So far, a total of 8,237 farming households have received vouchers. A total of 3,791 farming households have received all six vouchers while others have received four and six vouchers, respectively. The table below provides details on the total number of received by households per county. All 10,000 households will have received their full allowance of vouchers and redeemed them for inputs by the end of the program.

County	Target	# HH that received vouchers 6	# HH that received vouchers 4	# HH that received 2 vouchers	Total voucher recipients	Pending
Montserrado	2,500	1,116	794	0	1,910	590
Margibi	2,500	958	44	1,469	2,471	29
Lofa	5,000	1,717	2,139	0	3,856	1,144
Total	10,000	3,791	2,977	1,469	8,237	1,763

Indicator 2.3: % of vouchers redeemed

There were a cumulative 37,592 vouchers distributed to beneficiaries from the start of the project to the end of the reporting quarter, valued at \$375,920 USD. This amount constitutes

62.7% of the number and cost of vouchers to be distributed to small holder farming households through EREL.

EREL currently has five vendors participating in agricultural inputs fairs in the three counties (three in Lofa, two in Montserrado and Margibi).

Indicator 2.4: Usage of vouchers

Agriculture inputs Post-Distribution Monitoring (PDM) surveys were conducted during the quarter in the three counties. The results showed that agricultural inputs vouchers received by farmers during the quarter were used to purchase rice seed, as planting season for upland rice occurs between April and July. A positive sign is that there was no indication of beneficiaries paying for services provided by the program. However, some of the beneficiaries incurred transportation costs to access the agricultural inputs trade fairs centers.

The result of the germination tests proved that seeds provided during the fairs were viable, with an aggregate average germination rate of 92.5% for the three counties – Montserrado: 93.5%; Lofa: 91.5% and Margibi: 92.5%. Decision making was primarily made by household members participating in the trade fairs, the majority of whom were heads of households. There is a need to raise awareness on participatory decision making at household level. (See Annexes V, VI and VII for Ag PDM Reports.)

Indicator 2.5: Percent of farmers who used at least one sustainable agricultural crop practices and/or technology

Follow-up visits were conducted to farmers. Two hundred Lead Farmers indicated that beneficiary farmers have adapted a number of improved agricultural technologies, including planting cassava on mounds, which produces better yield than planting on flat land; spacing of crops, which increases the crop yield; and weeding, which also fosters better growth and development of crops for a better yield. The improvements in agricultural practices are a result of training provided by Lead Farmers to beneficiaries through demonstration plots.

VI. Lessons Learned/Challenges

Weather: There was heavy rainfall in the three counties during this quarter. Flooding degraded many of the already bad road conditions and damaged bridges. This has increased Mercy Corps' difficulty in reaching more isolated communities to distribute cash and agricultural vouchers to our beneficiaries. The cash payment team was frequently stuck in the field late into the evening as vehicle tires were damaged or deflated due to bad road conditions. To address these challenges, EREL and our implementing partners have been holding discussions with beneficiary communities and local leaders to mobilize local resources to repair damaged bridges.

VII. Conclusion

The project is making good progress and is on track to meet its targets. Most beneficiaries received their fourth and fifth tranches and expressed happiness and gratitude to USAID and its implementing partners. Household dietary diversity and household hunger scale surveys showed significant improvement in the three counties. As receiving these cash transfers frees up other household income for other priorities, some households are investing in small businesses and other livelihoods activities to enable them to maintain relative food security status after the EREL program phases out. Follow-up conducted by program agronomists showed that farmers sowed rice seed purchased during the fairs. The findings showed a high germination rate of these seeds, as well.

Plans for Next Quarter:

- Continue cash distribution, targeting 30,000 households with at least one cash transfer.
- Follow-up training of Lead Farmers.
- Agricultural inputs distribution to 200 farming groups.
- Post-Distribution Monitoring.

ⁱ Calculation is based on the average household size of five persons