

## THE CHANGE PAGE

'Gender and transport', a policy area on the move: key issues for consideration in Malawi's gender and transport policies.

Briefing notes prepared for discussion with Malawi Rural Travel and Transport Program (MRTTP), Ministry of Local Government, Malawi and the Ministry of Women, Community Services and Youth (Gender Policy and Program Development) on behalf of the Rural Travel and Transport Program (UNECA and World Bank).

### Introduction:

'Gender and transport' has begun to feature internationally as a recognised issue in transport policy and planning. Similarly, transport has begun to feature on the agenda of gender policy and planning. At major international transport meetings, gender and transport are now on the agenda: within the World Bank, a gender and transport thematic group has been set up which operates between the 'gender' and 'transport' domains of the World Bank. Much of the interest in this gender and transport issue has been fuelled by the writings and operational experiences of Africans and those working on Africa. Currently, the International Forum for Rural Transport and Development is in the process of co-ordinating nineteen small projects on gender issues in rural transport in Africa with support from the Department for International Development (UK). In no other context are gender and transport patterns so visible or so pressing as they are in Africa. For those of us who are African, who have worked in Africa or have taken the time to study carefully such African data as exists, the differences in male and female transport patterns are all too clear. Women's role in carrying the transport burden of rural Africa, often unaided by even the simplest of technologies, is great as compared to that of her brother and takes place at considerable consequences to her health and to economic efficiency.

The RTTP pamphlet (1998) puts the argument quite simply:

'Rural Africa walks and carries its burden. And most of this burden falls on women.'

The cost of women carrying Africa's rural transport burden is felt very clearly in the absence of girls from the schoolroom: a loss which is viewed by leading economists as of great consequence for the economic development of Africa. Similarly, women's transport burden in Africa has negative consequence for the realisation of their full productivity in the agricultural sector: once again the relationship between gender and agriculture in Africa has very marked differences to the other regions of the world and the meeting of women's transport needs has great consequences for this sector. Finally, the health costs of women's restricted access to transport are great: consider the consequences of head loads on the spine and the health complications this introduces. Similarly, women's comparatively restricted mobility as compared with men disables them in gaining access to contraceptives, health knowledge and health services.

The purpose of today's meeting is not to present an expert account of how matters stand in Malawi but rather to use this opportunity to collect the voices of Malawian experts together in a ground clearing exercise on 'gender and transport' and to explore together issues and solutions which have emerged in discussions elsewhere to see how these best relate to Malawi's needs and opportunities. Along with today's presentation, there is a general invite out to discuss the topics one on one or with groups at other times and locations of your choice over this next week and a half. If anybody feels there would be benefit in taking a field trip together to discuss substantial gender and transport issues in situ, then that would be a most welcome experience.

So the agenda today is for me to offer you something of a menu on gender and transport as it has developed over the last decade within the professional literature and in development practice. And your job has to be to interrupt when you wish and at will if there are points that need clarified or examples that you can provide to support, or seemingly to reject, what has been said. The key has to be participation: unless the local dimension is integrated into the professional literature and operational practice, then both professional literature and operational practice will fail when it comes to implementation. So our key is participation and with this key we have more chance of unlocking rural development, and simultaneously gender equity, than with any other.

Before moving to our main discussion, I want to ask you to begin to think in terms of

transport interventions which have gender benefits and  
gender interventions which have transport implications or benefits.

As an example of a transport intervention which has gender benefits we might think in terms of a community bus which improves women's ability to move their loads to market. Simply providing a bus may not do the job: rather care has to be taken in the design of the service to ensure that women's access is indeed improved. But the improvement is primarily achieved through the development of an additional transport resource which is harnessed to a gender goal.

As an example of a gender intervention which has transport implications or consequences we might think in terms of the decentralisation of health facilities. The evidence on the decentralisation of health facilities is that such decentralisation better enables women to make the journey to the facilities. However, in the same way that the journey for women to health facilities is made easier, the decentralisation of drugs and supplies now requires an additional level of transport organisation. Getting health care supplies to decentralised locations requires appropriate transport planning - a gender intervention which is unsupported by appropriate thinking around transport considerations will run into difficulties.

The reason we focus on transport intervention and gender intervention so immediately today is that within this meeting we have both infrastructure and gender competences present. The prize on gender and transport lies in the dialogue between these interests and it seems in Malawi the ground is already ripe for the movement of this dialogue.

## Gendered travel and transport patterns: multiple tasks, mobility constraints and heavy loads

Men and women very often have different transport patterns and different transport needs. In Western societies, women's journeys are frequently multi-purpose with trip chaining being a prominent feature of female journeys whereas men's journeys are frequently single purpose, single trips. In the developing world, most particularly in Africa, women frequently bear the responsibility for headloading goods, crops, water and fuel whilst simultaneously carrying children at their back (Barwell and Malmberg-Calvo, 1989; Sasakawa Global 2000, 1997).

Time budget studies in Africa (World Bank Africa Region Gender Action Plan, 1996) have shown the extent to which women's multiple social roles (as worker, as domestic provider, as child carer and carer for dependants, as food producer) intensify the time demands on women to the extent that women can often be deemed 'time poor'. The constraints of women's multiple roles often constrict their ability to travel and their ability to gain the resources with which they can bargain for an improvement in their position. They often experience severe scheduling difficulties in 'freeing the time' for looking after their own health or gaining the information they need to improve the quality of their own life and that of their dependants.

The heavy loads carried by women are a marker on the inequitable distribution of household and survival tasks as between the genders. Where transporting a load is a male task we frequently see its technologisation even if at the lower end of the wheeled transport scale. Heavy loads are a consequence of the historically weak bargaining power of women and the carrying of heavy loads removes the energy for shaping change. In many locations of Africa, the weakness of women's bargaining power can be traced to colonial rules and regulations which disadvantaged women on the labour market and in the ownership of land. Whatever the historic path, the inequitable distribution of household tasks as between the genders has very negative consequences for the education of the African girl child, for the health of African women, for the rural economy of Africa and its development and for the development of the social momentum for change.

Women's time poverty has real consequences for women's involvement in participation and decision making: similarly, women's mobility constraints have real consequences for improving their training on sanitation, health and agricultural improvements. But if change is to be effected these constraints have to be addressed: ensuring that women participating in a decision making initiative are provided either with some payment or some labour assistance to make good the time and product they lost in participation is essential. Similarly, on the transport and travel front, it is important to bring consultation services to the field itself - the extension worker in agriculture is one such model, though all too frequently the extension worker has not served the needs of female farmers.

Even at this very early stage of our argument, we have reached two very clear 'gender and transport' propositions:

*Information, education and communication campaigns targeted at achieving an equitable distribution of domestic and survival tasks between the genders could greatly lessen the transport load on women and girls. In fact, this is one of the goals of Forum of African Women Educationalists (FAWE).*

*Women's participation in local level decision making requires to be appropriately resourced to meet their time and mobility constraints. This theme emerges time and time again within the writing of African gender and participation experts. Participatory projects need to build in an honest assessment of local gender participation costs.*

We also have a couple of sub arguments emerging on 'gender and transport' which we can usefully dwell upon.

*A more equitable division of the burden of transport between the genders is likely to generate the social momentum for further improvements in transport organisation. Information, education and communication campaigns can be placed upon a mobile footing: the benefits of mobile facilities for IEC, health provision (immunisation), and extension activities have been tried and tested. Four Ghanaian women rural development experts recently called attention to the benefits of mobile facilities in increasing women's access to services in a mode compatible with women's own time and space constraints (GHACAD conference, Accra, 1998). Mobile banking was regarded as a key candidate for adoption.*

### A vehicle for change: gender protocols in user group construction

'Gender and transport' is sitting on something of a new professional ground: the growing recognition of the importance of the area is accompanied by the equal recognition that as a profession transport planners have failed to produce systematic methodologies which incorporate gender analysis for the purpose of development and planning. At present, it would be fair to argue that there are no systematic gender inclusion procedures for transport either in terms of the training of professionals, the participation of users or the design and planning of systems, services and equipment. The profession is beginning to catch up and the Chartered Institute of Transport (a leading global transport education and certification body) 'Transport and society' course is about to gain a gender component. Similarly, discussions have begun in various quarters about the need to develop 'gender and transport' short courses as a way of quickly bringing the transport profession, development experts and indeed gender experts up to speed in the area. The training of a body of African women transport professionals who also have a gender and transport expertise is a priority: and the building upon the capacity, knowledge base and competences of the relatively few existing African female transport experts has to be the first of priorities.

Once again, and fairly early on in this section of the argument, policy recommendations begin to reveal themselves:

*Developing short 'gender and transport' courses on the basis of local experience and context coupled with appropriate regional and international professional input would assist in generating national and donor sensitivities to the array of gender and transport issues present in the society.*

*Ensuring women are proportionately represented within those training as transport planners either internally or on scholarships abroad would help to 'grow' the necessary transport and gender expertise to meet the specifics of the Malawian situation.*

The training of professionals takes time: similarly, the collection of appropriate 'gender and transport' data to inform policy does not take place overnight. But there is one relatively rapid and reasonably inexpensive move that can be made in improving gender input into the planning process. That move is to ensure that when transport user group exercises are undertaken women are proportionately represented: this provides both a new source of data on transport efficiency and transport needs and a feedback channel on past transport failures. A recent World Bank study by Jack van Holst Pellekan and Theresa Hartnett noted that, in Africa, men only focus groups rarely mentioned obtaining water as a priority social issue where women only focus groups placed this at the top of their agendas. By talking only to men the scale of the transport burden imposed upon women in water fetching is lost; by talking to women, the problem is once again revealed. There is good reason to suppose that this would be true of a number of areas of transport provision in relation to gender.

*Ensuring women are adequately represented on transport project and transport intervention user groups is a priority if the scale and type of women's transport needs are to be determined and met.*

Both government and donor initiatives in Africa have often failed to conform to the above protocol yet its adoption would make a very great impact on the quality of data available as well as upon the ability to better design and fine tune 'gender and transport' initiatives.

The participation of users of facilities in the decision making around where to locate those facilities is crucial: women as the water carriers need to be consulted as to where bore holes should be located.

*Women should be consulted in the location of facilities which are being developed to meet their needs.*

## Decentralisation and distribution systems: the need for synchronisation

Earlier we provided the example of the decentralisation of health facilities, very often a gender intervention, and drew attention to the transport consequences which very often have not been thought through (limitations of wet season access; insufficient transport market on feeder roads to ensure delivery of goods by non-dedicated services; poor communications network adversely affecting effective ordering of supplies). There are

other examples which can be given of gender interventions where the transport implications have not been thought through: for example, the distribution of contraceptives if it is to be effective has to reach the hands of women - women if they have contraceptives can persuade their husbands to use them. But if the distribution structures of the region hold up these contraceptives at various logistic bottlenecks and the contraceptives never reach the local level then the presence of contraceptives within the country does not reach the unmet demand for these goods in the rural areas. Ensuring that the policy recognition of the need for contraceptives as a gender intervention is met by an appropriate policy action in the transport sector to ease the passage of these goods through the distribution system is vital.

*Gender interventions and transport interventions have to be scrutinised for their synchronisation possibilities and necessities.*

In the case of Malawi, the DFID funded radio-telecommunication aspect of the Safe Motherhood project provides us with an example of such synchronisation. The object of the project is to link health centres with hospitals and emergency ambulance services through a radio-telecommunication network - this will better enable the transport of mothers experiencing critical deliveries safely to hospital.

Appropriate technologies: local design, local resources

We have moved quite a distance with our argument and some of its parts are on a more general level than others - a common situation when a new field is being formed and nothing to be worried about - but there is one place we ought to visit as an example of a relatively simple transport innovation which has had tremendous gender benefits in Africa. The place is South Africa and the innovation is termed 'the hippo'. Women had been involved in the traditional head loading and as part of an action group had been discussing with some alternative technology experts what would lessen their load. The solution was a plastic barrel which had a screw cap and onto which a handle fitted at either end - the women could now push the barrels much like trolleys with the benefit that the rolling of the barrel makes for its own path maintenance. The women who have adopted the hippo have generated cultural markers around it: they sing of the freedom the move of load from head to simple wheel made for them.

*Gender and transport arrangements vary from site to site even within a country consequently, it is appropriate to look for local as well as national and regional solutions.*

Appropriate technology developments may remove the need for a substantial proportion of 'gender journeys'. For example, the use of solar cooking facilities - a technology which has been introduced in a number of areas of Africa - can greatly reduce the need for journeys to collect firewood. The use of wind driven water pumping facilities - also used in Africa - can reduce the number of journeys made or the distance of journeys made to collect water.

## Community transport: serving Africa's female farmers

Community transport and gender provision is an issue of some consequence for rural Africa. Many rural areas, even where relatively good roads have been constructed, fail to develop an active transport market. Frequently vehicles come on a seasonal basis only to remove the crops, crops which have often been sold forward in the knowledge that the female farmer has no ability to transport the goods in any bulk to market herself. Designing agricultural interventions which take this transport aspect into account would make a major contribution to gender welfare and poverty alleviation in Africa. Currently the prospects may seem bleak as the prospect of using communications technology to link a set of villages which might own a community vehicle between them seems remote. However, central actors in the technology field are predicting that hand held affordable communications technology could be a feature of rural Africa within five years (Worldspace international). The prospects of such a communications revolution opens up the prospect of a changed transport horizon: fleet management technologies which were previously confined to the commercial world, the world of warfare or to the urban world may be available in Africa's rural transport sector enabling a more efficient use of rural based community vehicles.

Two arguments flow from this understanding:

*There is a need to inventory the transport needs of female farmers in order to enable their economic improvement and to consider the community options in the context of transport market failures.*

*There is a need to keep a finger on the pulse of communications change and the implications that this may have for 'gender and transport' provision in the future.*

## Microfinance and transport organisation: increasing female access

There are two directions in which the microfinance and 'gender and transport' arguments can clearly be taken. The first returns once more to Africa's girl child. Many girl children are involved in headload carrying for profit on Africa's markets or as hawkers who weave between the traffic selling their goods. To assist girl children to remove themselves over time from these exposures to transport dangers, there needs to be a consideration of youth banking. Setting up accounts for these children which over time enable them to enter some other trade or line of business is a policy which deserves consideration - the Government of Ghana has set up such a scheme for housegirls.

*Girl children working in dangerous transport contexts can be assisted to move into safer occupations through the setting up of microbanking facilities.*

The second direction is the extent to which microfinance can be brought within the reach of women to enable them to accomplish a whole set of activities including travel and transport. Research we conducted in Ghana showed that women could rarely find the sum

needed to acquire a bicycle and that schemes which enabled them to do so were absent from the market.

*Transport interventions designed to improve gender equity should be accompanied by appropriate microfinance schemes targeted at women which make this a possibility.* The Grameen Bank of Bangladesh has shown the tremendous strides which can be made in women's social and economic development by linking microfinance opportunities to women's economic goals.

## Conclusion: the taboos around gender and transport technology

Within Africa, and indeed within much of the world, there have been very real taboos associated with women making use of technology, including transport technology. Within countries and even within regions, taboos can vary from location to location and, whilst some may be largely vestigial, some may be very real.

Within the transport profession itself historically taboos around the discussion of gender and transport were very strong. The extent of the taboo is marked by the composition of the profession and the character of its debates.

Let's begin to break the taboo by listing our own suggested 'gender and transport' interventions.....

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