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## **USERS NOT LOSERS: GENDER REPRESENTATION IN TRANSPORT DESIGN AND OPERATION**

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This paper is dedicated to the memory of Vera Nyarko, an outstanding student of the University of Ghana, Legon, who left behind her a healthy child and a commitment from her tutors to raise the issue of childbirth taboos in transport and social policy.

### **Abstract**

Women are the backbone of the rural transport system in Africa (World Bank, 1995/1996) yet women are absent in the rural transport policy making process. Not only are they absent as professionals in the design and management of the transport system but they are also excluded from making inputs as user groups. There has been no systematic attempt by any development agency to incorporate women's experiences and knowledge of the transport system through the development of user groups with appropriate gender representation. Women's feedback on their transport needs has no forum. This paper explores the need for such a forum: outlines the resources and new communication technologies which can be harnessed in creating such a forum; and investigates the role development agencies can play in 'growing' women's full incorporation in the design and use of transport. If women as transport users are not to be losers, their feedback on transport design and operation is essential. The genders have different transport needs, the transport profession must develop new approaches to meet these increasingly apparent differences. Africa is a critical site for new user group protocols and practices.

### **1. Introduction. Women, walking and well-being: a vicious policy spiral.**

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 (Sasakawa Global 2000, 1997). Within Africa, research into rural transport organisation has revealed that the human transport of goods, crops and materials necessary for survival greatly exceeds the motorised transport of these loads (World Bank Intranet). This human transport of load is referred to as the rural transport burden and is fully measurable. Within the rural transport burden, in its turn, the female component of that burden is fully measurable. The evidence is that the female component of the rural transport burden is disproportionately large. For some countries, such as Malawi, the share of the rural transport burden carried by girl children is substantially greater than that carried by adult women.

Women walk with load and this load negatively affects their well-being. In the case of the African girl child it keeps her out of the school room; in the case of the African woman, it creates physiological difficulties which register in childbirth difficulties; in the case of old women, their inability to transport the load necessary to their survival results in their marginalisation and social stigmatisation.

A fashion has begun within transport and development to promote 'non-motorised transport' as an obvious good - a good which fits with environmental politics of western societies - without due consideration being given to the need to move the rural transport burden of African women off their heads and away from their bodies. It is important that the non-motorised transport solutions promoted for rural Africa explicitly address the need to achieve better levels of gender equity in the carrying of the rural transport burden and that they directly involve grass roots women in design and operationalisation of transport solutions (Malmberg-Calvo, 1994; Turner, Grieco and Kwakye, 1996).

The relationship between walking and well-being which exists in Western society does not hold true in Africa when that walking involves major load bearing on a daily basis. Easing the physical costs of major load carrying on African women has a set of non-obvious implications which need the specific attention of the transport profession if successful rural transport policies for Africa are to be found. Regarding rural walking trips simply as walking trips rather than trips which may interconnect with other faster and more convenient modes has obscured the need for clear discussions of intermodality within the African rural transport sector. To exemplify this rather abstract argument, a female farmer is likely and indeed often obliged to carry load on her head in rural areas where motorised traffic can not or does not penetrate but good intermodal policies can provide locations and facilities where female farmers can place their goods and persons on motorised services which link them to markets. Issues which are relevant to this understanding are sufficient levels of combined passenger/ cargo vehicles to accommodate female farmers transport needs or storage facilities for produce at the locations where walking or non motorised paths meet with motorised transport corridors.

To meet the transport requirements of agriculture in rural Africa, transport planners must explicitly consider women's transport needs because women represent a very large

percentage of farmers. The currently fashionable argument that the bulk of rural African trips are local walking trips and that the primary goal is to service these walking trips ties us, if we are not very careful, into a vicious policy circle. As the transport needs of African female farmers have not been well serviced, practices have developed where female farmers sell their harvests forward to middlemen or middlewomen (a common feature in Ghana) who bring the crop from local rural centres to urban centres. In this arrangement the female farmer receives little reward for her effort, the rent extracted by middlemen or middlewomen registers as very high transport costs, the agriculture sector does not perform to its full capacity and appropriate transport markets for the development of African agriculture have not developed (Grieco, Apt and Turner, 1996).

The image of African women sealed into walking trips within local areas that leads the present policy discussions in the literature is largely an outcome of the failure of planners to recognise the female contribution to agriculture in Africa, their corresponding failure to consult with female farmers around the moves necessary to develop appropriate transport markets and the professional lack of attention to the issue of intermodality which necessarily attends the transport of goods and persons from slow mode locations (rural areas) onto fast mode networks. If African women are to be users of the transport system and not losers in the planning process, their needs must be assessed and their voices consulted in making adequate provision for their future (Turner, Grieco, Guitink & Annorbah-Sharpe, 1998). Both professional and political processes which ought to meet their needs have failed to date - the time for change has arrived.

## **2. An African demand for gender representation in transport planning.**

Currently in Malawi, the World Bank along with various government ministries is seeking to improve gender representation in rural transport planning. Within the framework of the Rural Travel and Transport Program (RTTP), a concerted effort is being made to ensure that the participation of women in rural communities informs and directs the operational measures to be adopted in improving rural transport provision. Within the RTTP - and there is an excellent slide show on the World Bank's web site (World Bank Intranet) - gender has been identified as a key issue for policy attention in respect of Africa, as has the servicing of small holding farmers.

Within Malawi, local experts have prepared analyses and documentation which demonstrates that addressing the female component of the rural transport burden is a critical issue in developing appropriate policies. As a practical matter it is now clear that it is possible to generate measurable performance indicators on the basis of which the value of any particular gender and transport intervention can be assessed. Documents under preparation by the Malawian RTTP team provide a clear practical guide to these issues - soon the public literature will contain definite guidelines for operationalising gender in the rural transport sector. This will be a substantial professional advancement over the old situation.

Demands for gender representation in all planning and decision making processes in Africa have emerged out of the African preparations (the African Platform for Action) for

Beijing. Post-Beijing, African governments (such as Ghana, Uganda and Malawi) have been active in meeting these demands; African agencies such as the Organisation for African Unity and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa have been active in promoting issues of gender equity in education and leadership domains; African NGOs have been equally active in maintaining the momentum of Beijing in respect of changing the gender decision contours of Africa; finally, donor agencies have begun to review the gender issue in African transport policy and to negatively evaluate projects and programs which do not adequately address it. This latter dimension has less public visibility than the others which preceded it on our list but it is real nevertheless.

Gender and participation have become key terms in the African rural transport dialogue - indeed directories and web sites have recently begun to appear in the area with increasing frequency. It is a field on the move and a measure for which there is clear local and African demand - a demand which is accompanied by policy calls from other locations for change in practices of consultation to better accommodate gender considerations, locations which include the industrial world..

### **3. Transport context and transport culture: the need for change.**

The field is clearly on the move: the issue begins to be how as a profession transport planners address the drive from client governments, from resource rich donors and from local communities for better practices around gender and participation in rural transport planning. Reviewing the outcomes of past rural transport planning in Africa, it is clear that the needs of the key constituency, female farmers, have been almost completely ignored at great consequence to the health of the agricultural economy, and in turn national economies.

It is true that the needs of many smallholder male farmers have been neglected also - but women's multiple roles, and the measured time poverty and task overload of rural African women, compound their particular difficulties. In many locations in Africa male and female in the same household operate separate income and expenditure streams with the consequence that resources in the hands of a husband are no guarantee that this wealth will reach his wife/ wives or offspring. Policies which assume that it is irrelevant which gender is served by the transport system in the determination of household welfare are not appropriate for Africa (Turner and Fouracre, 1995).

The social and cultural organisation of a locality has consequences for its transport context and transport culture. A clear example would be the need to provide separate facilities for the transport of men and women in a context where purdah is practised. In the absence of such facilities, purdah may take the form of confinement to a particular location. Given separate transport facilities, garments may be worn which permit women to enter public space without violating rules about contact with men. Culture has consequences for the journeys which are permissible but equally the availability of a range of transport facilities can expand the range of journeys which become permissible. An expanding transport context - a context which embraces technologies as well as the organisation of their operation - has consequences for culture not least because it opens

up new terrains for negotiation between the genders in any locality

In designing transport systems and programmes for rural areas in developing countries, it is no longer appropriate to simply impose the implicit cultural assumptions that guide the design of those transport programmes on the range of varying contexts. The practices of wholesale techno-cultural transference that guided colonial planning were marginally transformed within the post colonial period but not substantially so with the effect that there is a high level of project failure in the transport sector in Africa. The imperative now is to develop systems which are locally sustainable and which meet local needs rather than maintain existing local patterns. Planning for the trips which should be made rather than for the repetition of the trips which have routinely been made is a key requirement. To provide an example of one such change in transport thinking, the British DfID is planning to install radio telecommunication facilities between ambulances, health centres and hospitals in Malawi in order to reduce levels of maternal mortality - these radio communication facilities enable those from slower mode locations to gain access to fast mode facilities. Although, the DfID has not yet suggested the idea, the facility could be extended into even more rural areas by linking radio-motorcycle ambulances into the system.

Planning health crises rural transport facilities has not been a customary feature of rural planning for Africa but in the DfID experiment we begin to see a change and it is a change which is located in gender and transport. Consultations with local women on the form of organisation which would best suit their need would be a wise step in such a project not least because birth customs often play a very great role in Africa in determining whether or not a women in crisis labour leaves her locality. In certain regions of Ghana, maternal mortality is connected with local customary restrictions which require women to give birth at home. Providing an ambulance without consulting with local women and involving them in Information, Education and Communication campaigns which negotiate a change in these restrictions has limited utility. Providing an ambulance may need to be accompanied by measures such creating a context where there is a local community leader who can give the authorisation for a women to be moved to hospital in crisis conditions.

The pressure for gender representation in transport planning is a sound one. In developing appropriate professional responses to this new impulse in the transport environment, transport planners neglect contextual and cultural issues at their peril. Gender performance indicators are under development and failure to consult with local women will register on the evaluation of these indicators. Although, it may come as a surprise to many transport planners, for Africa, maternal mortality may be seen as an indicator of transport failure. It certainly provides the profession with a clear indication of where crises transport provision is necessary; it also provides an indication of the importance of accessibility to prenatal facilities. In the central region of Malawi, poor access to prenatal facilities is accompanied by high levels of infant and maternal mortality.

#### **4. The policy space for intervention: gender and participation post Beijing.**

The discussions of gender and participation which have emerged from Beijing give transport a new policy space in which it can operate. Transport interventions are to be harnessed to improvements in gender equity. At the heart of many issues of gender equity is the key transport concept of accessibility. In the developing world, donors have come to realise that if women are to take advantage of health services these need to be decentralised to the local level (Turner and Grieco, 1998). Decentralisation is at the heart of the Better Health For Africa initiative of the World Bank. Recognising women's restricted mobility and poor accessibility to services results in promoting different types of service provision and development. In Africa, two patterns have emerged: a) the movement from the building of large urban hospitals to the development of many more smaller local health service provisions and b) the greater use of women from the communities themselves who receive a basic training through development initiatives to equip them in health practice (these schemes usually make use of traditional birth attendants as core personnel). These changes have largely gone unrecorded by the transport community but there are clearly lessons that can be gained from putting the key question to any form of service provision: is this service sufficiently accessible to women with their customary mobility and accessibility constraints?

In the west, and in the bid to handle the strangulation of cities by congestion, transport planning is being asked to move towards a 'softer' role of the management of transport supply and demand, the development of robust regulatory frameworks and the servicing of wider social objectives such as poverty alleviation, increased participation, sustainable development and improving the status of women. Current policy from the significant donors in this sector speak of transport sector policy trying to include the following things:

- Involving stakeholders
- Securing finance
- Restructuring institutions and involving the private sector
- Integrating the environment and society
- Improving regulations and operations

(EC Towards sustainable transport infrastructure, 1996)

The discussions around the involvement of stake holders and those around integrating the environment and society both lead towards greater participation of users in the development of transport options. Donors have begun to systematically utilise user group planning techniques in their new approaches to the governance of transport development.

User group techniques can assist in the Information, Communication and Education aspects of gaining acceptance for new transport approaches, not least that of non motorised transport or in the developed world, perhaps, road pricing. However, user group planning techniques typically fail to ensure adequate gender representation most particularly within the development context as a review of World Bank sector documents quickly evidences. There is currently no participation protocol in the transport sector which ensures that each and every transport project considers the gender dimension and has gender representation in reaching that consideration. Though pressure for community participation should logically and rationally result in attention being given to gender, however, all too often 'community' participation is confined to men. In the bulk of present donor work on transport in Africa gender has not been specifically addressed, however, the case for gender inclusion is clear and there is a need for institutional protocols which ensure its consideration. At present it is easy as a task manager to overlook gender: no protocols are in place and no sanctions are applied to those who fail to consider the neglect of the transport needs of over half the world's population (Turner, Grieco, Guitink & Annorbah-Sharpe, 1998).

It is widely recognised that women are grossly underrepresented amongst transport professionals, in politics and in leadership positions in general both within the developed and the developing world. Changes along all of these dimensions are likely to see the better servicing of women's transport needs in the long run: in the short run, great improvements could be made by ensuring that women are appropriately represented on user groups and on focus groups to ensure that the relevant design and service feed back is provided to transport planners, transport operator and, perhaps, as importantly though rarely discussed, transport funders such as the donors.

The collection of high quality gender data is now possible, the gender disaggregation of data is a growing donor and popular demand, the global transparency of transport modes their successes and their failures is now a possibility; user participation is now a respectable and strengthening policy : in this new context, the gender aspect of user groups needs explicit consideration. The emerging social logic is clear and it has the potential to generate better and more appropriate transport systems.

Transport planning has largely operated on a male biased set of travel assumptions. Negative practices in respect of gender range from disattention to women's collective mobility and accessibility needs and the acceptance of existing gender discriminatory arrangements as the natural order to deliberate exclusion of women from transport forums and transport modes in accordance with local 'customary' practices. At present, transport development is investment led and not service led both in the developing and developed world. However, changes in the policy climate caused by the growing levels of congestion and the concern about the environment are causing a rethinking of habitual and customary relationships. The focus must, if congestion is to be conquered, be increasingly on mobility and accessibility. Similarly, and parallel, a focus on gender and transport is not primarily a focus on high tech transport forms but rather a focus on mobility and accessibility. Gender issues will increasingly emerge most particularly in the discussion of poverty alleviation. As of yet the professional transport community does

not have a clear understanding of what effect poor accessibility has on the lives of the poor or how to improve their accessibility.

The UN is on record as saying that 70% of the world's women are poor. Yet, transport planning and policy currently has no data methodologies or planning protocols to reflect this reality in the way the sector develops transport to alleviate poverty. The key must lie within the domain of accessibility planning and in the identifying the wider range of journey purposes and the contexts in which these journeys are made. An enhanced version of the Oxford activity approach would provide a good starting point for the development of a suite of new methodologies appropriate to a service led approach (Jones et al. 1983). There is a new range of communication tools which can be used in developing and elaborating this methodology. Similarly, and complementarily, there are a new range of communication tools for improving the interaction between gender roles and transport which could be utilised within user group planning techniques.

In the development context, encouraging a culture of gendered user group planning requires considerable supporting activities. Communication competences require building and will be greatly enhanced by the development of appropriate feed back techniques and protocols. There is a need to build virtuous spirals in which users own contributions are visibly and transparently incorporated. This requires planners to focus on ways of incorporating visible and transparent protocols for accessing and making use of user group feedbacks so as to motivate user groups and to improve the transport development dialogue. The knowledge that their involvement has an impact on the design of the transport provision and the siting of services will encourage users to provide the feedback necessary for a well functioning set of relationships between the environment and society.

## **5. Conclusion: Improving women's access to appropriate modes of transport.**

The benefits of including systematic gender consultation in transport planning are clear:

- There are benefits in terms of the comfort and convenience of a large sector of transport users.
- There are time and cost savings at the level of the household, the policy and service institutions and society overall.
- In Africa, appropriate transport services for women could release major productivity benefits in the organisation of agriculture.
- Also, in Africa, moving loads off the heads of women most particularly firewood water releases the time of girls for education with major economic benefits being claimed by mainstream economists for the national economy.
- Women's involvement in decision making and decision taking on, over and around those services which affect their lives is a democratic good.

We have argued that the gender dimension of transport planning has been sorely neglected and that the time is ripe for change. It is not sufficient for development, planning and transport service agencies to adopt participatory protocols: although this is a clearly an important and necessary step it must be accompanied by attention to gender before these can achieve their full participatory potential. In addition we have argued that the incorporation of electronic feed back techniques in service and development planning would render user needs more transparent and result in user difficulties having a higher priority as performance indicators.

The claim is that unless gender is mainstreamed into professional practice, gendered difficulties in the access to transport will persist with negative social consequences. Both technology and policy awareness are now sufficiently advanced for gender to be raised up the technical inventory of transport engineering: resources can be claimed for participatory planning modes if the profession places its institutional will behind the agenda. So what would these protocols look like? In order to develop relevant and practical user group techniques which meet the gender issue, a number of dimensions have to be addressed.

At a basic level, the presence of women in the composition of user groups has to be assured. At this level there are a number of options, mixed user groups, women only user groups, men only user groups. Why bother with women only user groups, the evidence is that when women speak within mixed groups, the conversational dynamics work against them being listened to.

This insight raises the issue of ensuring that women's voices are heard. Where women's voices have not been heard in any particular programme of user group use, it is important that back up procedures exist in order to elicit those voices. It may be that more time has to be spent by facilitators better acquainted with the host user group in order to extract those voices. But the silence of voices can not be taken to indicate that all is well.

When we have reason to expect that women are experiencing transport difficulties which they have not attested to, there is a need for procedures to be developed based around their identifiable interests. Women's headloading visibly generates discomfort but they may not have the social space to complain about their circumstances: they may however have the space to discuss ways in which matters can be improved. It may be that incremental change is the most acceptable local planning outcome but the use of user groups to get to that point is critical as a mechanism for inducing further change, User groups can begin a process of empowerment for women which is virtuous in both its policy and social outcomes.

In constructing user groups it is important that their use not be simply confined to capital cities, a frequent development pattern, but be widely spread across the range of national transport circumstances. Arranging user groups in remote locations may have greater logistic problems however it is precisely the remoteness of the locations and the

difference that that implies that necessitates customised user groups for those locations. Participation and decentralisation should ideally move hand in hand: but protocols can be designed to ensure that the level of decentralisation, region, and locality be met.

The potential for donors and governments and service providers to build electronic feedback systems into their transport operations is already present: it is simply a matter of the commitment of resources. The evolution of high tech development management is proceeding rapidly, for it to proceed effectively it must build in effective participation: as the [Global Knowledge 97](#) electronic conference hosted by the World Bank and the Canadian Government demonstrates, the development of electronic user groups facilitated by community communication facilities is already a possibility. Ensuring that gender is built into the electronic protocols is essential: the new social opportunity for electronic advocacy and beneficiary sovereignty should not be wasted.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan has gone on record with his recognition of the importance of the new electronic forms for better governance and is clear about his intentions of ensuring that the benefit of these modes will be extended to the developing world.

".....Citizens will have access to better information, too. Because more and more sectors of society will become involved in receiving information and in processing it, their own decisions -- including their voting behaviour and participation in political and civic affairs -- will be sounder. The information revolution will affect governance by improving the responsiveness and accountability of decision-makers and by giving more transparency to decision-making."

Needs and demands no longer need to be interpreted solely through professional vision: they, as Ross Perrot recognised in the early 90s, can be accessed directly. Women finally having a mechanism for direct expression and in substantial numbers which need not be limited by the mobility and accessibility constraints. And transport organisation has a mechanism for better linkage to its market and its demands. A listening profession, women on the move...

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