

Good Practice: Gender and Rural Transport Initiative (GRTI)

Developing Sustainable, Participatory Local Initiatives for Transport Projects

Factors to Ensure Sustainability in Transport Projects

One of the major problems with development projects has been that they often begin with laudable goals and initial benefits for the target population, but within a relatively brief period of time, the projects gains begin to decline. In the case of transport projects, transportation systems break down while roads, tracks or bridges become unusable again. Particularly when external assistance is withdrawn, projects that have not originated locally or have not properly integrated the local population are unlikely to be sustained.

The participatory approach to development interventions is generally accepted as one that is more likely to result in sustainable initiatives. Several issues, however, need to be built into projects to ensure long-term success. The first issue is who should be involved. It is very important to identify the appropriate groups, including gender considerations, for any project. Local participation should be part of the project right from the planning stage. Capacity building is often required for the local groups to carry out their roles effectively and to assume ownership of the project. In addition, sustainability depends upon economic viability. A transport project that is losing money cannot be locally sustained even if it is providing an important service to the community.

GRTI Experience in Promoting Sustainable, Participatory Transport Projects

GRTI has sponsored several pilot projects with varying degrees of participation and sustainability. In the case of the GRTI project in Guinea, the objective of acquiring a boat to be owned and operated by a local group of men and women was based on the realization that existing transport in the mangrove area was problematic due to the difficult terrain and lack of reliable transportation. Local management of an improved system would benefit the people directly, including an increase in their income. With the high illiteracy rate and lack of technical and managerial skills, however, capacity building was needed and provided. The gender mixing of group membership ensured that the needs of both males and females were met. The group receives sufficient income not only to meet repayment, operating and maintenance costs, but also gives economic benefit to members who enjoy free transport services.

Local management and capacity building were similarly the core elements of the GRTI-sponsored pilot project in Cote d'Ivoire which focused on a local rural transport service promoting the use of motorized tricycles. To create awareness of the service and encourage local participation, meetings were held in five selected villages. Local project management and implementation units were then set up in each village with existing CBOs in partnership with an NGO, a private company and government officials. The local CBO was responsible for the use of the IMT and setting reasonable prices to mobilize funds to buy additional tricycles. To ensure effective local operations, training was provided to the drivers and mechanics. Community members were also trained in

management skills in addition to feeder road maintenance. Both males and females benefited from the different types of training. The project has not only improved transport conditions for the rural dwellers, but it has provided employment for the drivers and the local mechanics. Transporting agricultural produce more easily and cheaply has also enhanced income and alleviated conditions of rural poverty for the rural dwellers.

In another example, the initial GRTI activities in Kenya were concerned with the reconstruction of the Nkone Bridge to provide access to rural communities otherwise cut off from other areas. With the completion of the bridge, it was recognized that the continuous repair and maintenance of the roads had to be ensured so that the transport problem would not resurface. The follow-up activities were focused upon engendered, participatory infrastructure management. The target population lacked the necessary technical knowledge to carry through the management activities, however. Through a participatory training workshop for the local population, rural dwellers, including men and women, were encouraged and given skills to carry out the local maintenance of the roads, foot bridges and tracks that were identified and prioritized in terms of importance to the rural inhabitants. The transport needs and constraints of both males and females were taken into consideration and women and men were involved in the planning process. The community ultimately came up with its own long-term maintenance plan. Due to this strategy, the sustainability of the benefits of the infrastructural development project could be better ensured.

Conclusion

Development programmes that incorporate a participatory approach have a higher likelihood that the benefits can be sustained. The examples presented from the GRTI experience have shown that this approach often requires extra effort by providing needed capacity building and conducting participatory meetings. Nevertheless, ultimately the local population should be in charge of projects that can clearly be seen to be for their own advantage. Women should be directly involved in the decision-making and local management of development projects to ensure that their gender-specific needs are addressed. The pilot projects supported by GRTI have demonstrated that they can very effectively manage or contribute to transport initiatives of various types. Engendered local participation has been shown to be a Good Practice in transport projects to ensure sustainability of interventions.