

Good Practice: Gender and Rural Transport Initiative

Locally Produced and Maintained Intermediate Means of Transport (IMTs)

Importance of Intermediate Means of Transport (IMTs) for Alleviating Rural Transport Constraints

Lack of good rural transportation systems is a constraining factor to rural development. Yet, improving rural transport is not limited to improving roads and providing motorized vehicles. Most of the rural livelihood activities are carried out around or within the rural community, including activities such as going to and from the farm plots, sometimes carrying implements, inputs or produce, gathering firewood and other non timber forest products, fetching water, visiting friends or relations as well as attending schools or clinics. Most of such transport-related activities are borne by women and carried out through walking and head-loading.

The use of intermediate means of transport (IMTs) such as animal carts, push carts or bicycles can greatly ease the transport burden of rural dwellers. It is on the basis of this realization that the Gender and Rural Transport Initiative (GRTI) included the promotion of IMTs to rural dwellers, particularly focusing upon the transport needs of women.

Advantages of Locally Produced and Locally Maintained IMTs

A common difficulty in technology transfer projects results from importing foreign technology. The initial cost is often a hindrance to adoption and the later inability to repair the equipment due to lack of technical skills or spare parts may lead to abandoning the innovation. To reduce cost and facilitate the process of replicating rural transport projects, IMTs should be locally produced and locally maintained. This constitutes a Good Practice found in several GRTI projects.

The GRTI supported study from Ghana reported that bicycle trailers, push carts, some types of wheel barrows and donkey carts are locally produced in the northern regions of Ghana. The result is that there is generally an adequate supply of these IMTs as well as sufficient spare parts for their repair. There are numerous local repair shops stocking the common parts required. It was also noted that a few of the parts are locally designed and that these components and spare parts are often more accessible, cheaper and more durable. Repair shops are found in nearly every community in the locality. There is, however, a need for more rural dwellers to utilize the IMTs as all of the manufacturers and suppliers noted that a critical mass of IMT users has not yet been established. The study recommended that easier access to IMTs is needed, particularly for rural women.

The study in Malawi reported on a locally produced cart that was designed to alleviate the burden of head and shoulder loading and provide an alternative to over loading of bicycles. The Malawi Hand Cart is able to carry a maximum capacity of 100 kg. One identified problem was with that the rim of the wheel often flattened if the cart was overloaded. Some experimentation yielded a stronger, locally fabricated type of wheel

for the cart. Since the cart was only produced in one location in the country, it was difficult for rural dwellers in other parts of the country to secure the carts. To make the cart more accessible, its production was carried out in a second location.

The GRTI supported pilot project in Guinea also followed this Good Practice. It involved the local construction of a boat made from local materials with the skills of local artisans. One of the challenges posed by using local materials arose from the socio-cultural practices of the locality. In order to gain access to the cutting area well-known for the quality of wood to be used for the beams, traditional ceremonies involving the local elders had to be observed. A process of negotiation was carried out and the materials secured in a socially acceptable manner. With the integration of local materials and skills, the resulting IMT was considered to be a technology that really belonged to the people.

Locally Produced IMTs can be Modified

An additional advantage of local production is that modifications in design can be made to suit local preferences or changing conditions. In the pilot project in Cote d'Ivoire, the use of motorized tricycles was promoted. The original design of the motorized tricycle had an unprotected back cabin that only carried goods. This design had to be modified so that the back cabin could be covered to protect passengers and goods. In this way, the tricycles could meet the needs of the rural dwellers to assist their children to attend primary schools in other villages, to ensure that medical attention could be obtained for those needing to get to health centers and to ease the constraints of transporting produce, water and firewood.

Conclusion

The experiences and information obtained from the GRTI pilot projects and studies clearly indicate that local production and maintenance of IMTs is possible and has several advantages, including more likelihood of sustained and more widespread accessibility and use. This practice also allows development strategies to respond to the unique social and ecological conditions of any specified locality.