

Good Practice: Gender and Rural Transport Initiative (GRTI)

Promoting Gender Sensitivity for Relevant Stakeholders in Rural Transport Projects

Need for Gender Sensitization to Develop Effective Rural Transport Interventions

The Gender and Rural Transport Initiative (GRTI) is a project of the Africa Rural Travel and Transport Program (RTTP). RTTP was established to relieve the transport problem in rural areas, but it was found that there is a need for gender considerations to be integrated into the program. This was due to the realization that women carry a larger share of the transport burden, yet with less access to means of transport relative to men. GRTI was designed to strengthen the capacity of RTTP national programs to incorporate gender issues into their policies and strategies and ensure resulting projects are gender responsive.

A major limitation to achieving this objective, however, was the lack of sensitivity to the significance of gender relations in rural development generally and for rural transport projects in particular. This was especially significant since rural transport projects were usually dominated by engineering designs for improved roads and vehicles that overlooked the social dimensions that prevented females from benefiting from such projects despite the fact that they had a greater need for relief of transport burdens. Gender sensitivity was found to be needed by policy makers as well as development workers and even to the level of the local population, including the rural women themselves.

Workshops Involving Different Stakeholders to Promote Gender Sensitive Transport Projects

Several GRTI projects were in the form of workshops with objectives that included gender sensitization for a variety of stakeholders in the transport sector from high ranking policy makers to program planners and project implementers to the members of the local population. Each workshop incorporated a slightly different approach with different target groups, but the basic goal was to inform participants about the gender dimensions of human activities and the realization that interventions, including development projects in the transport sector are very rarely gender neutral. The workshops further enlightened participants not only about the need to involve both males and females in development projects, but also potential modalities for integrating women in such initiatives. This is considered a Good Practice as the level of gender awareness is generally low in most sectors outside the traditionally gender conscious areas such as health and education, such as the transport sector.

The gender sensitization workshops in Madagascar and Malawi focused upon enlightenment of policy makers. In Malawi, the workshop was organized for Principal Secretaries in government with some participants from other organizations. The workshop conducted in Madagascar included not only representatives of administration, but also a sizable number of the participants were students and professors. The

workshops held in Cote d'Ivoire and Kenya concentrated on sensitizing people at the grassroots level who would participate in other project activities, specifically in the management of intermediate means of transport (IMTs) and road rehabilitation respectively.

In Tanzania, workshops were held with gender sensitization activities that involved a wider cross section of stakeholders. A national level workshop was directed to officials from relevant ministries, district level officers and the private sector. Other workshops were also conducted at the district level involving development workers and representatives of the local communities. In Zimbabwe, a similar strategy was followed as workshops were held with policy makers and others were held in two communities. In the latter case, the workshops were conducted in the local language. This is a Best Practice since it was based on the realization that gender sensitization is needed from the highest policy-making level to the grassroots to ensure that appropriate policies will be formulated and that these policies will be effectively carried out.

Patterning the Workshop Content to the Participants' Needs

Having separate workshops for different types of stakeholders is appropriate so that the relevant information can be presented and in a manner that is easily understood by each target group. It was found that in most of the GRTI supported workshops, however, the content was similar, despite the different characteristics of the participants and their particular information needs. Gender sensitization workshops have tended to present a technical background to definitions of gender, historical development of gender movements, types of gender related needs and so on, regardless of the specific information needs of the participants. While the content may be interesting, the application of the knowledge gained to the specific development project may be lacking unless the sessions can be made very practical and participatory.

It has been seen that some policy makers, development workers and technical experts have participated in several gender sensitization workshops, yet are still unaware of the need or the manner to apply gender issues to project planning and implementation. Conducting gender sensitization workshops should be seen as an integral part of specific development programs, such as improving the transport sector, rather than as separate, generalized activities. The goals of such workshops should be identified, based on a clear understanding of who the target beneficiaries should be, what their information needs are and their capacity to assimilate and apply the messages passed across during the sessions.

The experience gained from the GRTI gender sensitization workshops has demonstrated the need to provide gender training for a variety of stakeholders that will carry out different roles in rural transport projects. It has been found to be a Good Practice, the benefits of which are likely to spill over to other development spheres as well. At the same time, the workshops have been found to be just one of the components in the process to achieve gender equity in development programs. The knowledge gained must be applied to have the desired effect.