

Safety and Gender Issues in Rural Transport in Busia District, Uganda (Chapter 6)

By Kwamusi Paul



Introduction

In recent years, improving rural transport has become a concern of policy makers in Uganda, where 90% of the population is rural and agriculture is the mainstay of the economy. Efficient rural transport services are important for increasing accessibility, for reducing time and effort and for easing barriers to services and social facilities.

Promoting improved rural transport requires consideration of a number of issues. One issue is to examine how gender relations affect rural people in terms of access, management and control of transport services and safety. In Uganda there is little systematic examination of rural transport issues in overall transport planning. Despite an increasing rate of accidents on rural roads, there is relative neglect of the accident problem amongst transport planners. It must also be remembered that although rural

travel accidents are common on rural roads, rural travel extends to include paths and tracks. There is little documentation on the relationship between safety, gender and rural transport

This research uses a multidisciplinary approach to investigate safety and gender issues in communities in Uganda. The study aims to improve understanding of how the access, use and control of intermediate means of transport, particularly bicycles, impact on safety in a wider context.

There is a need to establish that safety is a rural travel issue. It is commonly assumed that since rural travel involves walking and cycling where the travel speeds are quite low, the issue of safety does not arise, and efforts should be directed towards accessibility. Safety, like comfort, is considered an urban transport phenomenon.

Background to the Problem

The problem of safety has been mainly defined in terms of accidents. Essentially, there has been little attempt to integrate safety with other rural travel issues at the policy or local levels. While studies have shown that the behaviours of road users towards safety is a problem, there has been little attempt to link this behaviour to gender. It has also been assumed that the problem of accidents can be solved by public awareness initiatives alone with little recognition of the local social knowledge of the societies confronting the problem.

First, a series of questions need to be asked regarding safety and accidents in rural transport. Is there a problem of accidents in rural transport? How can they be

reduced? How can the management of safety in rural travel be sustained? What has been lacking in current assessments?

Second, is the issue of defining the relationship between gender, safety and rural transport. How can gender help us understand the management of safety? What are people's transport priorities? What are men's and women's perceptions of safety? What is the potential for community initiatives in accident reduction?.

And third, what are the issues relating to the policy options and terms of interventions? What could be the wider policy option? What is the nature of the current transport system? How does it affect safety? What is the position and status of safety issues in overall transport management? How much priority should policy processes give to people's involvement? How can local knowledge and initiatives be integrated into the process?

Objectives of the study

- To investigate how gender relates to safety in rural travel
- To examine the impact of the accident burden on women
- To provide useful recommendations with regard to safety in rural travel

Research Issues

There are several research questions and issues that needed to be answered and investigated at the community and policy levels.

At the community level the questions relate to how road safety is perceived and managed by road users, how safety is influenced by gender, how accidents

compromise rural accessibility and how safety is a limitation on the use of intermediate means of transport.

At the policy level, the research needs to establish what the safety issues in rural travel are at present, how these influence a framework for better management of road safety, how road safety can be managed at the local level and how the community, and women in particular, respond to the lack of road safety.

Research Methodology

The study first examined the literature and conducted discussions with safety managers in Busia and Uganda in general. This was complemented by surveys in Busia area to identify the various aspects of safety management.

Busia is located in Eastern Uganda. It is bordered by Kenya on the East, by Tororo District to the North and by Iganga District to the south west. Busia has a total of 65kms of classified roads, 298 kms of feeder roads and an undetermined amount of community roads and paths. The district was selected for two reasons. First, because it is known to have the highest number of bicycles per population in the country. Public hire bicycle taxis (boda boda) originated in Busia, and bicycles are a crucial means of travel in the rural areas. Second, there is a marginalisation of women with regard to bicycle use. Women have limited access and use to bicycles unlike in central Uganda where it is culturally acceptable for women to ride.

A cross section of people i.e. community leaders, women leaders, peasants and community extension workers were interviewed. Much of the information was collected through active interviews using a semi-structured questionnaire. Stratified, proportional

and systematic random sampling was used to ensure representativeness of the different groups.

The study had certain limitations. The research period (six months) was a relatively short period to examine and research the issues involved in the study and the resources limited the scope. Busia is a relatively new district and it was quite difficult to secure background statistics needed for the study. Inland water transport is an important mode of transport, especially on Lake Victoria, and an important mode of transport in the district, but for reasons of time and resources the study limited its focus to land (road) transport.

Transport Modes and Safety

Walking

Walking is by far the most predominant mode of mobility in Busia District for personal, economic and domestic activities. Generally women carry out more walking journeys than men, largely because of their domestic responsibilities.

Although walking is largely seen as a safe mode of transport there can be significant risk and lack of safety in walking. Much of the walking risk is attributed to being knocked down by either bicycles or motorcycles. However, the study findings showed that risk was perceived in a number of other ways including unintentional falling, injury from thorns and sharp objects, falling in holes, animal bites and attacks as well as collision with cycles and vehicles.

Unintentional falling can result from head loading, slippery paths, stumbling, running and falling into holes. There are various types of injuries that arise out of falling but they are largely of a minor nature, though sometimes fractures can happen. Knee and toes injuries are common from falling. All the respondents had fallen at sometime while walking. One explained it with a local saying “a child grows up by falling”.

Head loading contributes to falling because of the instability of walking. Most head loading is done by women and most loads are heavy and the distances covered are long. This causes fatigue and contributes to falling. Headloading makes it more difficult to see clearly ahead and behind. When head loaded, women find it more difficult to hear the sound of cycles or vehicles.

During the wet seasons many people fall due to the slippery surface of the roads and paths. On some overgrown paths morning dew can also cause slipperiness. Stumbling increases when paths are uneven and toes are often injured on stony surfaces. Visibility is poor on rural roads and paths especially on moonless nights and in the early hours of the morning. Very few people can afford to travel with torches. Injuries can also happen when travelling in a hurry such as running to avoid the rain.

Snakes and insects pose risks to rural travel. This is especially the case for women collecting firewood and clearing bushes for cultivation. There are many tropical insects that are dangerous such as scorpions, tsetse flies and Martis. Bulls, baboons, dogs and he-goats are also known to attack travellers. Women seem more vulnerable to these attacks than men though the reasons why were not clear.

There are also risks to pedestrians from being knocked down by cyclists.

Cycling

Bicycles are the most commonly used intermediate means of transport in Busia district. Accidents from bicycles can occur by falling off the bicycle or through collision with other cycles, vehicles and pedestrians.

Accidents from falling off bicycles are common. Women passengers are particular victims because of the way they sit on the bicycle. Accidents also occur when bicycles collide on village paths and sometimes when cyclists collide with domestic animals. Collision with motorists occur more often on feeder roads and on the classified road network. Many rural paths are narrow and can only serve as a single cycle lane, leading to greater risk and accidents. Many of these accidents are serious and often fatal.

There are many causes of cycle accidents. Many cyclists disregard right of way and keep-left regulations. Women cyclists are commonly acknowledged as being more careful than men and some women have cited lack of safety as a reason for their disinterest in cycling. Most accidents occur when cyclists are riding at a very high speed. Bicycles also tend to be old and poorly maintained and many riders ignore defects to the brakes. The cost of new bicycles and spare parts are often unaffordable to rural people. New bicycles have a 58% excise tax and there is 65% tax on spare parts. This has compromised safety and has led to use and adaptation of older bicycles. A traffic count in Busia revealed that over 90% of the bicycles have no headlamps even when they are being used in the night. Cyclists say they cannot afford the price of a cycle dynamo and that they are also afraid of theft.

Alcohol consumption is common in the rural areas, particularly during the post harvest and festive periods. Drunken riders affect safety by riding on village paths, knocking down fixed objects and pedestrians. Drunken pedestrians also contribute to accidents by staggering and by not giving way to other road users.

Rural travel commonly involves transporting goods from one place to another. In order to reduce the distance travelled, some riders overload their bicycles beyond the limits of safety, causing balancing and stability problems leading to accidents.

Safety in bicycle use is not regulated. The police are reluctant to enforce safety among cyclists beyond handling accident cases because there is much political outcry when cyclists' interests seem affected. There is also no mechanism for ensuring safety in rural areas where the police have little access. The local administration is more concerned with the *boda-boda* bicycle taxis from whose owners they can collect revenue.

A large number of second hand 50 cc motorcycles have been introduced into the rural areas, particularly for *boda boda* services. They have increased safety concerns because of their higher riding speed, the lack of competence of their riders and their higher contribution to accidents.

While women are most commonly the victims of accidents in the pedestrian mode, men are more involved in cycling and motoring accidents. This is because men do most of the cycling, because their cycling speeds are high and because they trend to carry more load on their bicycles. They are also greater risk takers.

Safety and accidents in rural transport

There is a significant element of risk and lack of safety in rural transport, in both cycling and walking. The fact that rural transport is characterised by low speed is irrelevant.

One reason why safety has been a peripheral concern in rural travel and transport is the lack of data to support the problem. Only 7% of the road accidents in rural travel are brought to the notice of the police and only 20% of the victims seek medical assistance.

There is a strong belief among local people that accidents are a result of bad omens caused by supernatural powers. So most accident victims prefer traditional healers to modern medicine, even for severe accidents involving fractures. What is important however is that accidents are kept secret and people are unwilling to reveal details of the accidents to outsiders, either the police or the medical; authorities. This causes problems in the collection of accident data and makes many of the accidents “invisible” to official institutions.

Many accidents are caused by recklessness on the part of road users. The community has its own mechanism of resolving conflict by compensating the aggrieved party. Elders and clan leaders arbitrate, even in the case of fatal accidents. The guilty party is fined according to what the community deems appropriate. In most cases the aggrieved party is compensated by having his bicycle repaired or in the case of death, by payment of animals. After such resolutions, the aggrieved are reluctant to report the accidents to the authorities.

In many cases, the person who is injured is related to or has a kin and friendship relationship to the guilty party. It seems very unsociable to report the accident to the Police.

Accident burden on women

Due to their different transport needs, travel risks affect women and men in different ways. The study shows that women suffer from lack of safety both directly as travel accident victims and indirectly as post accident victims. Whereas women are mostly direct victims of accidents related to walking, men are victims of cycling and motoring accidents. Despite the fact that men take greater risks than women, and women are more conscious of safety than men, women are victims of travel accidents, principally through headloading.

Most of the accidents that occur to women happen while they are engaged in domestic tasks such as collecting fuelwood, and water. Accidents from walking are seen more as personal injuries. The narrow perception of safety to cycle/pedestrian or motorist/pedestrian accidents means ignoring many accidents occurring in the rural areas, especially those happening to women.

In addition women suffer indirectly from accident related factors. Women have the responsibility of nursing accident victims, whether male or female. This increases the burden on women. Where victims are hospitalised it implies extra travel to the hospital, usually several kilometres away, on foot. Providing care also compromises productive tasks such as agriculture, especially when the accident happens during crucial farming periods like planting or harvesting. The increased burden posed by providing care to

accident victims often means that women pay less attention to their other responsibilities, particularly the care of children.

The research reveals that rural travel mishaps are one of the leading causes of disability in Busia district. If women are seriously disabled, the husband marries another wife and enters into a polygamous relationship. Where men are injured, women do not look for another option.

Safety also has a direct relationship with productivity. Accidents contribute to the decline in the standard of living. In one homestead, the family sold their only cow that used to provide milk to the neighbourhood to raise funds for a victim's treatment. Children in the neighbourhood lost the privilege of drinking milk.

The study found out that one of the main reasons for women's reluctance to ride bicycles is safety. Many women gave fears of accidents and previous accident experiences as reasons for not cycling. Many preferred to walk rather than cycle, using bicycles only in an emergency. Others preferred to push loads on a bicycle rather than to ride it.

Recommendations

- There is need to widen the definition of safety in rural travel to take into account accidents while walking. Further investigations need to be carried out with the aim of collecting data on rural travel accidents in order to provide evidence to policy makers. There also needs to be more systematic documentation that can be used to gain support from policy makers for rural transport issues. A gender analytical perspective has helped reveal that the accident burden is

disproportionately shouldered by women although they are more safety conscious than men.

- Standards ought to be implemented on bicycle safety
- Many cyclists feel that safety programmes are directed at drivers of motor vehicles and not them. It is important to change this perception. Radio programmes on safety are rarely listened to by rural people. Community policing programmes could raise the issue of safety at the rural level.
- Communities should be encouraged to rehabilitate and maintain community level transport infrastructure on a self help “bulungi bwa nsi” basis. Government should complement community self help efforts, particularly by providing support to adequate drainage on access routes.
- Communities have little knowledge of first aid. This and the absence of medicines at district health centres encourages the use of traditional healing that may not always be appropriate.
- There is also need to review bicycle designs to enable safer carrying of larger loads and other increasing use by women.
- Women’s groups should be mobilised to promote safety at the local level

Information about the Book - Balancing the Load. Women, Gender and Transport

The **Balancing the Load** book is the culmination of a networked research programme that began in 1998 when only a few pioneering studies existed on the subject of gender and transport. Today there is a growing body of knowledge and an increasing number of transport initiatives that seek to reduce the unequal burden of transport tasks, improve women's participation in transport activity and to encourage women's access to transport services and means of transport. You can find further discussion of the issues and links to relevant initiatives by clicking on the gender link at <http://www.ifrtd.org/new/issues/issues.htm>

Book Contents:

1. Introduction: Bridging the Gap between Gender and Transport - Priyanthi Fernando and Gina Porter
2. Social Exclusion and Rural Transport: A road improvement project, Tshitwe, Northern Province, South Africa - Mac Mashiri and Sabina Mahapa
3. Intermediate Means of Transport and Gender Relations in Zimbabwe - Dorris Chingozho

4. Do Intermediate Means of Transport Reach Rural Women in Tanzania? - Josephine A. Mwankusye
5. Bicycles, Boda Boda and Women's Travel Needs: What impact? Mpigi, Uganda - Harriet Iga
6. Safety and Gender in Rural Transport Busia, Uganda - Kwamusi Paul
7. Bridges: What Impact on Travel and Marketing? Nkone River Bridge, Meru, Kenya - P. G. Kaumbutho
8. Feeder Roads and Food Security: The impact, Darfur, Sudan - Suad Mustafa Elhaj Musa
9. Off-road Areas: A Gender Perspective on Transport and Accessibility: Women Traders, Gomoa, Ghana - Gina Porter
10. Road Rehabilitation: The Impact on Transport and Accessibility: Soba District, Kaduna State, Nigeria - Mohammed-Bello Yunusa, E. M. Shaibu-Imodagbe and Y. A. Ambi, with Aminu Yusuf and Bintu Abdul Karim
11. Gender Needs and Access to Rural Transport: Tuya, Yatenga Province, Burkina Faso - Amadou Ouedraogo
12. Women's Empowerment and Physical Mobility: Implications for developing rural transport, Bangladesh - Nilufar Matin, Mahjabeen Mukib, Hasina Begum and Delwara Khanam
13. Cycling into the Future: The Pudukkottai experience, Tamil Nadu, India - Nitya Rao
14. Women, Water and Transport: Mapping the interplay, Banaskantha, Gujarat, India - Poorni Bid, Reema Nanavaty and Neeta Patel
15. A Forest Economy and Women's Transportation: Dumka District, Bihar, India - Nitya Rao
16. A Daily Odyssey: Transport in the lives of SEWA Bank clients, Ahmedabad, India - Sangita Shresthova, Rekha Barve and Paulomi Chokshi
17. From Dawn to Dusk: Rural women and the Calcutta metropolis, India - Mahua Mukherjee
18. Gender and Rural Transport: Chattra Deurali, Nepal - David Seddon and Ava Shrestha
19. Mountain Transport and in the Terai Nepal - Ganesh Ghimire
20. Cashcrops and Transport: Cashew growing and processing, Sri Lanka - Kusala Wettasinghe and Upali Pannilage

Published: May 2002

320pp

Hb ISBN 1 85649 981 2 £49.95 \$75.00

Pb ISBN 1 85649 982 0 £16.95 \$27.50

ZED BOOKS, 7 Cynthia Street, London N1 9JF

Tel: (44)(0)20 7837 8466; Fax: (44)(0)20 7833 3960

Zed Web Site: <http://www.zedbooks.demon.co.uk>

Free Copies are available (subject to availability) to organisations and individuals in the developing world. To obtain a copy please email the IFRTD Secretariat at publications@ifrtd.org

Individuals and organisations in Europe, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand should contact Zed books at sales@zedbooks.demon.co.uk