

Nepal: Gender and Transport (IFRTD)

These case studies are being compiled to draw lessons from the experience of a wide range of organizations. They are considered as works in progress and will be updated periodically. Comments on the cases are welcomed, as are suggestions on additional cases which could be included in the series.

Thanks to the International Forum for Rural Transport and Development (IFRTD) for making the report available on which this case study is based.

GENDER AND TRANSPORT - NEPAL

The author begins with the assertion that 'Gender considerations in rural transport interventions in the Nepalese context are rather new', and this study goes on to give evidence effectively to bear this statement out, through a review of the content of the transport planning component of the Five Year Plans in Nepal from 1956 until the present one which runs up to 2002, and fieldwork undertaken in two rural areas, one in the mountains, and a comparative piece of research based in the rural Terai (plains).

Traveling and transport take up a huge amount of time for rural Nepalis, and account for a good deal of drudgery. The research sought to answer such questions as: how is this burden shared by men and women? What are their transport needs? Are issues of gender taken into account in policy and planning? and finally, what impacts have various transport interventions had upon the rural populations?

Difficulty, drudgery and inefficiency of transport is a particular feature of Nepal, and has often been cited as the main obstacle to achieving a more rapid pace of economic and social development. Settlements in the Mountains is generally scattered and sparse, and the prevailing method of travel is walking and moving goods is by human load-carrying. Many of the communities have no motorable road at all. Movement of people and goods often involves much physical hardship.

In the plains, there tend to be clusters of settlements, linked to each other and to the outside world via a network of tracks or wide trails which have evolved according to needs over time. The local people upgrade and repair sections themselves, so that animal-drawn carts, hand-carts and pack animals can be used.

In the mountains the difficulty of travel has tended to lead to isolation, whereas in the Terai, malarial infections are a problem, connected with the seasonal flooding of the north/south flowing rivers which constrain movement both within the area and to and from the outside world,

Only since the planned development period, beginning in the mid 1950s, have there been efforts to develop transport systematically to encourage development in Nepal. A summary is given of the aims of each five year plan with regard to transport since they began. There has been a consistent priority given to 'strategic roads', such as feeder roads main highways, and also aviation, for long distance haulage, while for internal mobility emphasis has been placed on trails, local roads and suspension bridges. Low-cost rural roads and more environmentally-friendly approaches began to emerge in the 1980s, but, concludes the author, none of the transport planning and if they are gender insensitive'.

Only in the Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-85) was there any recognition for women's role in national development, but the document 'did not identify women's issues'. Subsequent Five Year Plans made clear declarations about women and development, but have failed to recognize any of the particular roles that women play, assuming that they are not involved in nation building and do not recognize women's contribution to economic growth. Only the current one (1997-2002) begins to address the issues of discrimination based on gender.

The author looks more closely at the roles taken by women and men in rural areas, and finds women's workload is spread more widely than men's over the range of domestic, household, agricultural and transport tasks. He then goes on to examine the impacts of certain RT interventions.

It is reported that building a road in a rural area has particular effects not only on the total stock of travel and transport tasks, but on the share of travel and transport tasks that men and women take on, and that this varies between the mountains and the Terai.

The fieldwork reports on a rural road constructed to connect the village with the market center. The road brought motor vehicles about one hour closer to the village, and there are plans to bring it closer yet. Irrespective of gender, the author reports, long distance travel has become easier. With better access to the market, the demand for dairy products has risen dramatically and the village people are raising more cattle to satisfy this need. This has actually increased household burdens. Travel and transport-related tasks have also increased, and this is not being shared equally between men and women. It is the women who have taken on the increased burden.

In the Terai on the other hand, the author reports on a village located on the junction of an earth track recently upgraded to motorable standard and an earth track built by the local people.

The improved road condition has facilitated the introduction of more motor vehicles such as motorcycles, light jeeps and minibuses. There is now a regular bus service to the market center and the village now acts as an important junction for the surrounding rural areas. Motorcycle ownership has increased dramatically, and the number of shops of all types has increased substantially.

The transport tasks are felt to have reduced, and many more women are now riding bicycles which has increased their mobility significantly, while some changes in taking responsibility for travel and transport tasks have been observed. For example, men using bicycles to collect fuelwood is a new and regular sight, which might indicate a gender shift of responsibilities at the household level. Women, in particular young women, are using bicycles to carry small loads. It is also the case that travel and transport tasks have increased overall and that women are taking up the extra load disproportionately, as in the mountains.

(Source: "Gender and Transport - Nepal By Ganesh Ghamire. Case study presented at the International Forum for Rural Transport and Development workshop in Sri Lanka. June 1999.)