

Sri Lanka: Transport in cashew-producing community (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.

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TRANSPORT ISSUES IN A CASHEW GROWING AND PROCESSING COMMUNITY IN SRI LANKA

The authors use statistical methods and a detailed knowledge of the area discussed over time to examine the relationships between an introduced technology and resultant changes in transport patterns and gender relations in a community, particularly with respect to the gender division of labor in the small- and micro-scale levels of production in the Sri Lankan cashew industry. The primary aim of this study was to ascertain the transport implications of non-transport interventions. The area is one where cashew processing techniques have naturally spread, and were later supplemented by a technology development project carried out by the Intermediate Technology Development Group, Sri Lanka.

Cashew processing developed as a cottage industry in Sri Lanka and has a high number of women in the labor force. About thirty thousand people are employed directly or indirectly in the industry. Over 70 per cent of these figure are women micro-scale cashew producers who are either self-employed or who work as casual laborers. In the area selected for study, both women and men are involved in earning an income from two or more sources. Their income patterns vary with the cashew season. Although some occupations seem to be male preserves, women still contribute to them, while being involved in household work, cashew processing and/or other income generating work. The main source of income for most of the population is cashew-related work. Such work is divided into separate activities such as collecting cashew nuts, selling raw nuts, decorticating and processing, selling processed nuts and clearing cashew plantations. Over 98 per cent of those decorticating cashews are women. Shortage of water is a problem in the area. Collecting water is mainly done by women and children. They spend an average of two hours per day doing this, on foot. If the source is more than 3 km. away, men will collect the water using bicycles.

Existing transport provision in the area includes a paved road from the village to the market center Puttalam, but it is badly maintained. Within the village there are four motorable roads, made of gravel with a high sand content, and a network of foot and cycle paths. The roads are difficult to use in both the rainy and dry seasons, owing first to dust and then to erosion. The main form of transport after walking is by bicycle, with 88 per cent of families owning a cycle. 26 per cent of families own a motor cycle, with a few more affluent families owning a tractor or van.

The authors divide the development of the cashew industry in Vanathavillu into three distinct phases, beginning from the introduction of cashew as a commercial crop in 1978. During this phase, ending in 1988, cashew was simply sold by the villagers as raw nuts to middlemen for further processing. These middlemen usually came to the village to buy. During this phase men did a lot of traveling, both to the cultivation sites and to take raw nuts to the traders for selling, using bicycles to carry loads. Women however were mainly counting raw nuts in their homes, a tedious activity, and their mobility was limited. During the second phase (1989-94) the technology of decorticating cashew spread gradually throughout Vanathavillu, instigated by women in efforts to add value to the product. It is probable that contact with other centers where ecorticating was already being carried out motivated the women. With the spread of this technology, traders began to call at the village on specified days, eliminating the need for villagers to cart their stocks of cashew to the town. Prices were paid as specified by the trader, so the villagers had little knowledge of prices paid outside the area. The Rural Development Bank became involved at this stage, issuing credit to small groups of cashew workers to enable them to buy and build up stocks of cashew so that they could go on processing after the cashew harvesting season was over. This credit system increased the social interactions of

women, and also the time they needed to spend at meetings etc.

The Bank official came to the village, so minimizing the need for frequent travel to Puttalam to access credit. In comparison with stage 1, this phase showed a high level of involvement for women, including an increase of involvement with outsiders and marketing/purchase related work. Women, were traveling longer distances to markets (150 kms. in the case of two women), hiring vans or using public transport. Analysis of this stage also showed that available transport was not on a par with the traveling done by women. Stage 3 (1994 onwards) illustrates how two major technology developments in the cashew industry have affected the people of Vanathavillu. The first was the introduction of a tray dryer, the second the setting up of a cashew processing center (CPC) was set up in the nearby town.

The latter half of this phase shows increased involvement of both women and men with the management of the CPC, which has a traveling component as representatives of different communities have to meet for discussions and make decisions. More women during this phase work as hired hands to decorticate cashew, and still no men are involved in this part of the process. It is no longer entirely home-based however, women travel to the CPCs. With the increase in women traveling at this stage, it is clear that their workload has increased. The data also shows that as their travel needs increased, women were more motivated to use vehicles, such as bicycles or motorcycles. Men and women both participate equally in the marketing of cashew during this stage, but men tend to travel further to do this and their use of vehicles is higher.

Several women members of the CPC have visited other villages up to 25km away to help other women to start similar income generating activities. Traveling to other areas and interacting with other women have helped the women of Vanathavillu to develop their self-confidence. Some mentioned that their status in the community had risen as a result of these trips. Women have thus moved in to areas that were previously controlled by men, and that women's status within the family and the community had been enhanced. However, at the 'lower end' there is no movement of men into the traditionally women-dominated areas such as home-based decorticating, housework and water collection tasks. Therefore women's overall work burdens have increased as a consequence of non-transport interventions, along with their status and mobility. It is also clear that women have taken the initiative in both introducing new methods and adapting to introduced improvements, and in doing so have enhanced the status of their community as a supplier of good quality cashew, bringing traders to their door even after difficulties experienced in themselves delivering the processed nuts.

Despite undeniable advances brought about by the technology transfer, they conclude that women have increased their productivity in all areas, along with their transport needs, but have not been able to shed their old tedious employment within the industry and their reproductive role, and that gender relations therefore remain fundamentally unchanged.

(Source: "Transport issues in a cashew growing and processing community in Sri Lanka" By Kusala Wettasinghe and Upali Pannilage. *Case study presented at the International Forum for Rural Transport and Development workshop in Sri Lanka. June 1999.*)