

GENDER AND RURAL TRANSPORT INITIATIVE

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GENDER AND RURAL TRANSPORT: KEY ISSUES

1. Introduction

The objective of this paper is to explain the link between gender and rural transport and to highlight issues in gender and rural transport. Some gender concepts and their link to rural travel and transport will be discussed.

2. Definition of gender

Gender is about socially constructed and culturally variable roles that women and men play in their daily lives. It refers to the way people of different cultures allocate roles, responsibilities, status and relate to each other based on how they perceive and rationalize biological differences between men and women (Moor, 1988). The socio-cultural setting of people determines the gender relations within any environment. Gender is about behaviors, beliefs, norms, ideas and myths of being a man or woman.

3. The link between gender and rural travel and transport

Rural transport has several components and these are:

- Provision of better roads
- Use of intermediate means of transport
- Improved design of transport infrastructure services
- Participation of men and women in planning and decision making in the location of facilities and services in order to reduce the distance to social facilities such as health centers, markets, water and food processing facilities.

Until recently, rural transport had been regarded as a technical issue, which did not require to be engendered. Rural transport is a gender concern and it affects between 60 - 70% of Sub-Saharan Africa who live in the rural area. Studies in Makere, Tanzania carried out by Barewell Calvo (1988) indicated that women are responsible for the major part of rural transport, particularly head loading. Women were found to be responsible for nearly 70% of transport time and nearly 85% of the effort. Transport related to domestic activities account for 70% of rural travel activities in rural areas. Existing time and effort linked to travel significantly constrains female economic and social activities (Banjo, 2000). Therefore improving rural transport will have a greater impact on women's time and effort than other members of the family.

The transport burden has resulted in the following gender imbalances: -

- Women work longer hours than men to meet their domestic requirements.
- Women often have health problems as a result of head loading.
- Women are not able to generate more income due to time and capital constraints.
- Girl - children are often pulled out of school to help in domestic chores which are often transport related.
- Communities experience limited access to markets.
- Agricultural productivity is limited

4. Key gender concepts in relation to rural travel and transport

There are many gender concepts that can be used to analyse rural transport. Some of the basic gender concepts and their link to rural transport are discussed below.

4.1 Gender roles and responsibilities

Gender roles are responsibilities defined by culture for either men or women who are then socialized into conforming to them. For example, it may be considered proper for women to carry pots to fetch water from the river or well, while men use mechanized transport such as animal drawn carts.

Gender roles change over time, through individual choices or with social or political changes such as economic crises, natural disasters, emergencies and post war situations in which the decision making power and responsibilities of women and men may change (World Food Programme, 2001).

In examining the different roles of women and men, the gender division of labour provides the underlying principle for separating and differentiating the work men and women do. It also provides the rationale for the differences in value placed on their work. The triple gender roles are described below (Moser, 1993).

Reproductive role comprises child bearing and rearing responsibilities and domestic tasks which are essential for the care and maintenance of the family. Examples include child bearing, child care, fetching wood and water, cooking, taking children to hospital and cleaning the house. This work is not paid and is naturally considered women's work.

Productive role comprises work done by both men and women for payment in cash or kind. It includes both market production with an exchange value and subsistence production with an actual use-value, and also a potential exchange value. Examples include ploughing, harvesting and working for wages among others.

Community managing role comprises work related to social events such as political meetings, weddings, funerals or community infrastructure projects such as building roads. The work is for common good to the community.

Women are usually tasked with all three roles which are usually referred to as the triple gender roles, while men perform the productive and some of the community work. The differences in the roles and responsibilities assigned to men and women result in different rural transport needs for men and women.

4.2 Gender needs

Women and men play different roles, have differential access and control over resources and face different types of constraints. As a result of this, men and women have different needs and priorities. When planning development interventions, it is often assumed that household members have the same needs. In such cases, women's needs are often not expressed (Moser, 1993).

In examining the gender needs in transport, it is important to note that women themselves are not a homogenous group. Not only do the needs and priorities of rural women differ from those in urban areas, but they also vary according to their culture, life-cycle, social standing and level of income. For example, married women with children have different needs to single women or women who head households with respect to their use of rural transport (Østergaard, 1992). Cultural factors also affect the different groups of women in their use and access to rural transport. In formulating transport policies and projects it is important to distinguish between practical and strategic gender needs. There is, therefore, need to understand the context of rural communities before any intervention and to be aware of whose needs the intervention or policy is addressing.

Gender needs can be divided into two, that is, practical and strategic gender needs.

Practical gender needs (PGNs) refer to those needs that are associated with living conditions, and related to women and men's gender roles. For example, women may identify their practical needs as those related to providing food, fuel, water, food production and processing tools, shelter, clothing, education and health of children. PGNS are often seen as short term needs requiring short-term measures or solutions. PGNS do not challenge gender inequalities in division of labour or relations (ZWRCN, 1999).

To the extent that rural transport policies and projects aim at alleviating the burden of women in carrying out their roles, both in enhancing the performance of each role and minimizing the time spent in travel, they are meeting the practical gender needs of women (Østergaard, 1992). For example, trips to the borehole to fetch water and to the market arise from women's practical needs.

Strategic gender needs (SGNs) arise from women's awareness of their subordinate position relative to the social and economic standing of men. Women's position may be measured by:

- Gender disparities in wages and access to employment opportunities (absence of women in labour based road construction).
- Women's lack of access to or participation in the democratic process (absence of women in RTTP structures, especially at lower levels such as district, ward and village levels).
- Women's vulnerability to poverty.

In rural transport it has been noted that women are not involved in planning or decision-making and in some countries they are not given a chance to work on the road in labour based roads construction. In such cases, their strategic gender needs are not being met.

SGNs challenge practical values and ideology; hence there is greater resistance to programmes aimed at meeting women's SGNs.

4.3 Gender analysis

The lives of women and men are structured in fundamentally different ways. They have different roles and responsibilities within the domestic and community arena. They utilize different resources, thus, they are affected differently by the same constraints or opportunities. For example if a bridge is flooded, women may have to take over the responsibilities that are usually taken care by men because the loads usually carried by carts or other mechanized means are now carried by head.

Gender should be considered as part of the general analysis of an activity, policy, programme, event or process. It is important to carry out gender analysis before any intervention. Gender analysis ensures that planning is based on correct information about the roles, resources, needs and priorities as defined by women and men. Gender analysis facilitates people - centered development planning by providing precise information about who the people are; people include women and men, the poor include poor women and poor men.

4.4 Gender mainstreaming

Gender is a dimension that has to be incorporated in all policies, programmes, projects and processes. Gender helps to understand better the attitudes, needs and roles of women and men in society, on the basis of social, economic, political and cultural factors. It should be mainstreamed and should not be considered as a separate issue (World Food Programme, 2001).

The purpose of gender mainstreaming is gender equity. Mainstreaming involves more than just having equal numbers of men and women in current initiatives or structures. It involves changing policies, programmes, projects and institutions so that they actively promote gender equity. When gender equity is recognized as a strategic objective of development, gender equality influences broad economic and social policies and programmes.

Gender mainstreaming can take various forms and stages which may be inter-related or interdependent (ZWRCN, 1999). The following are some forms of gender mainstreaming:

- National level gender policies.
- Sectoral gender policies (e.g. rural transport policies).
- Institutional or organizational gender policies.
- Development of gender sensitive programmes and projects.
- Gender awareness training and training on gender analysis and gender mainstreaming.
- Collection of gender disaggregated data.
- Gender sensitive research and documentation.

In rural transport, there is need to mainstream gender in policies, programmes and projects. As rural transport affects men and women differently, there is need to ensure that rural transport interventions lead to gender equity. For example, the location of a borehole or wood lot may not affect men because they are not tasked with the role of fetching water or firewood. On the other hand, the location of a bicycle repair shop may affect men more than women. It is, therefore, important that any intervention should address the needs of both men and women.

5. Conclusion

Gender is an integral part of rural travel and transport and it is important to ensure that all transport interventions, policies and projects integrate gender. The key to addressing gender needs related to rural transport is to ensure that the communities affected by the intervention or policy, participate fully during the whole project cycle, starting with the planning process.

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