

GENDER AND RURAL TRANSPORT INITIATIVE

GENDER ISSUES IN RURAL TRAVEL AND TRANSPORT

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Introduction

In Sub-Saharan Africa, women carry the majority of the day-to-day household transport burdens. The burdens include fetching firewood and water, taking grain to be processed, taking children to a health facility, carrying harvested crops from the field, among others. In addition, women account for about 70% of agricultural production in Africa. Women are almost exclusively responsible for household and child-rearing tasks. Therefore, they have numerous and diverse transport needs. For example, in rural Africa, women are involved in transport more than three times as much as men. Women also suffer the physical and health burden of head loading most of the fuel, water and produce (World Bank, 1999). This arises because of gender roles, which traditionally place the responsibility for meeting the household's needs and the resultant domestic transport on the women.

In some parts of Africa, women and young girls spend eight hours a day collecting water. In addition to the burden of carrying water, women often experience difficulties in obtaining water from the various sources. In those areas where water can be pumped, women have not been taken into account. The depletion of natural resources, especially trees, has meant that the distance walked by women to fetch firewood is increasing. Environmental degradation has had such a negative impact on the burden of women and girls since they are tasked with fetching firewood and wild fruits for household subsistence.

Due to economic and cultural reasons, women often do not have access to cash to buy transport services or technologies. The available transport technologies may not suit their pattern of use or their specific needs, such as combining child-care with other tasks. In different parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, there are sometimes cultural barriers to women handling animals, riding bicycles or even traveling on public transport. Capital and time constraints often make it difficult for women to generate income by offering transport services or means of transport, except at the lowest levels such as head loading.

The above factors have implications on women's lives in terms of lack of time for other activities, fatigue and strain from excessive load carrying. The women may be isolated from outside influences and information and generally lack control over the production and marketing processes involving transport. Inadequate transport can affect women's health in terms of strain from load carrying, risk of injury from falling when carrying loads on slippery paths and maternal deaths due to poor access to health care during childbirth.

Characteristics of gender in rural transport in Africa include the following:

- Women carry the bulk of the day-to-day household transport burden.
- Women also suffer the physical and health burden of head loading a large portion of fuel, water and produce.
- The continual water bearing over long distances can distort the pelvis of young girls, making the recurrent cycles of pregnancy and childbirth more dangerous.
- In addition to the burden of carrying water, women often experience difficulties in obtaining water from its sources.
- Due to economic and cultural reasons, women often do not have access to cash to buy transport services or means of transport.
- There are sometimes cultural barriers to women handling animals, riding bicycles or even traveling on public transport.
- Capital and time constraints often make it difficult for women to generate income by offering transport services, except at the lowest levels such as head loading.
- Environmental degradation has had a negative impact on the burden of women and girls since they are tasked with fetching firewood and wild fruits for household subsistence. They have to walk a longer distance to fulfill their gender roles.

Factors contributing to gender disparities in rural travel and transport

While poor men and women share many of the same problems of limited access to transport services, women are subject to additional constraints due to cultural factors limiting their access to available transport facilities, and to the fact that in many rural households the husband or father controls the use of household assets including transport.

Cultural factors affecting women's access to transport

- Men control the means of production including household income and they therefore control what intermediate means of transport IMTs are brought at the household level.
- Men's control of the household income means that in some cases, women cannot use buses without requesting fares from their husbands.
- Men control use of IMTs at household level
- Most IMTs are developed with men and not women in mind and consequently, are inappropriate for women
- Women's work is not defined as "work" and consequently, most means of transport are targeted to relieve the burden of men's work.

Physical access

Distance and difficulties of access to water, fuel sources and public services - particularly during the rains - represent a major time and constraint of the use of services. Access particularly affects women because they have major responsibility for transporting water and fuel. Women have limited access to whatever transport services are available.

Economic issues

Women's access to income is limited. Access to transport and transport facilities is largely determined by income. In cases where households are able to access IMTs, women are not able to influence when and how to use them and also the type of IMTs to purchase. Women have limited decision making in allocation and use of basic resources.

Credit schemes introduced at rural level have been formed to favor men than women. Often require security in form of land, or property which women do not control. Information on availability on credit, often does not reach women.

African societies often include many diverse cultural and ethnic groups, each with its own traditions concerning the economic and social roles of women. These differences lead to variation in gender issues arising in each country. However, the following issues are more common than note in most African countries:

- Women are primarily responsible for all domestic agricultural productive (marketing and community management. This arises from the gender division of labour.
- Men control the means of production including household income and they therefore, control what motorized transport and non-motorized transport women will use and how they will use and how they will use them.
- Rural women are inhibited from owning or using certain types of IMTs such as bicycles by cultural beliefs which ascribe such transport modes to men.
- Women's mobility is often restricted under most African societies and is subject to their husbands' or father's approval. Men on the other had do not need such approval.
- Women have less access to motorized transport.
- Traditional perception of the women's place as being in the home, excludes women from the planning and selection of for example, roads for rehabilitation.
- Labour based road rehabilitation programs have been found to benefit men more than they benefit women.
- Women are not consulted on the selection or designing projects.

Institutional issues

- There are selectively for women in senior positions in most transport planning and implementation agencies.
- Most transport planning, training and research institutions are dominated by man engineers and the environment at those institutions is often hostile to female candidates or staff members
- The level of gender analysis capacity is still very low as many project staff lack the skills to identify gender issues and to mainstream them in RTT activity planning, resource allocation, implementation and monitoring.
- Lack of knowledge of participatory research methods such as participatory rural appraisal that facilitate the collection of information on needs for women.

Conclusion

Gender is a crossing cutting issue in rural travel and transport and should be integrated at all stages of any rural transport intervention. This note gives a summary of some gender issues commonly identified in work done in rural Africa. The note is useful to rural travel and transport practitioners as a guide; it is necessary to carry out a gender analysis which is country specific before any intervention.

References

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