Access to transport is often a critical precondition for rural development. This note describes a rural transport project that, by involving rural women in its design and implementation, was able to deepen and broaden the project’s development impacts.

Rural transport projects that ignore the transport needs of segments of the target population run the risk of achieving suboptimal development impacts. Where women’s and girls’ transport needs and constraints are ignored, for example, girls’ school enrolments may remain low, women may be cut off from productive economic activities, and family members may be unable to access health care and other basic services. All too often, project consultations are held only with select individuals, such as village leaders, who do not necessarily understand or choose to report on the needs and constraints of the project’s intended end-users. Rural women are among the groups whose transport needs and constraints are most likely to be excluded in such consultations. Yet in most rural communities, women as much as men have transport needs associated with economic activity, schooling, access to health services and other activities important for community development and household well-being.

Women appointed to Roads Committees
At the consultation meetings, an NGO facilitated the appointment of villagers as members of Roads Committees, to undertake and contract out maintenance in the local area. Responsible to the community from which they were elected, the Road Committees approved operations, assigned tasks, paid wages and organized contributions of labor. The committees involved traditional community groups, including women’s groups, to ensure that the transport needs of all community members were met. PRR2 also incorporated targets for women’s participation in the committees, with the goal of at least 20 percent of road committee members being women. With the NGO’s guidance, women were appointed to leading roles in many committees and formed the majority of members of some committees.
In direct response to the needs expressed by women, PRR2 supported improvements not only to the roads connecting communities, but also to 3000 km of non-motorized transport (NMT) tracks—tracks that are most often used by women and are commonly ignored by road upgrading programs.

**Building micro-enterprises**

On completion of the road and track rehabilitation, PRR2 helped the road committees set up several hundred community-based road-maintenance micro-enterprises to maintain local roads and tracks, and also created a 'Local Development Window' to help fund other projects carried out by these micro-enterprises. To ensure women’s involvement, the project required that at least 10 percent of micro-enterprise members, and at least 30 percent of direct beneficiaries in Local Development Window projects, be women. The initially proposed criteria for micro-enterprise membership were also adapted to counter some of the constraints faced by women in the project area, for example, by prioritizing female-headed households, reducing the weight given to education level in determining membership, recognizing previous experience in specific tasks needed for road maintenance rather than in actual road building, and classifying women’s management of households as managerial experience.

**Women’s involvement shows multiple benefits**

Project evaluations of PRR2 suggest that, as a result of women’s involvement in project design and implementation, their productivity was enhanced, to the benefit of their households and communities as well as the women themselves. For example, women now participate more in markets and fairs, and spend less time obtaining fuel and food supplies than before project implementation, and their participation in local initiatives and political involvement have also increased. An impact survey found that 77% of women felt that the rehabilitated roads and tracks enabled them to travel farther, that 67% felt that the roads and tracks enabled them to travel more safely, and that 43% felt that the roads and tracks enabled them to obtain additional income.

Overall, the project helped to reduce travel times of both women and men by up to one-half, decreased transport costs for both passengers and freight, and increased the availability and quality of transport services. Cheaper and faster transport services in turn enhanced communities’ access to health services, improved the quality of education, facilitated social interactions, and enabled easier access to markets. In addition, the micro-enterprises generated jobs for about 4,700 permanent staff members, plus approximately 32,300 seasonal workers who maintain the roads and tracks. Many of the micro-enterprises have since developed initiatives beyond the transport sector, such as small-scale market trading and other entrepreneurial activities, thereby bringing new services to their communities and opening new employment opportunities. Women’s involvement was clearly key to these project outcomes.

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