

RURAL TRANSPORT POLICY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS IN MALAWI

RTTP and Government of Malawi (1999)

Objectives of the case study

This case study examines the role of the Rural Travel and Transport Program (RTTP) in Malawi and how it has contributed to the transport policy and institutional framework of the country. It looks at the objectives of the Rural Transport Policy (RTP), and identifies the various investment, regulatory and pricing strategies required for the policy to be successful. The institutional framework of rural transport activities in Malawi and measures employed to address problems of finance are also investigated.

1 BACKGROUND

In Malawi, it has been established that there are several factors that have limited the impact of efforts aimed at addressing rural travel and transport problems. These include,

- i) lack of clear policies for authority to address rural transport problems;
- ii) insufficient development of appropriate technologies;
- iii) inadequate priority to the rural travel and transport sector;
- iv) inadequate planning and financing;
- v) weak institutional framework;
- vi) underdevelopment of the sector in terms of infrastructure and means; and the lack of co-ordination.

The Government of Malawi (GoM) and the Sub-Saharan Africa Transport Program (SSATP) entered into an agreement to jointly undertake a series of activities aimed at improving the travel and transport situation and livelihoods of rural communities in Malawi.

The Malawi Rural Travel and Transport Program (MRTTP) is a new development initiative, established in 1999 to address issues in the transport sub-sector in a coherent manner. The goal of the MRTTP is to contribute to poverty reduction through the improvement of accessibility to socio-economic goods, services and facilities by rural communities.

The Program has six objectives namely:

- i) To establish a clear rural travel and transport policy and institutional framework;
- ii) To promote rural travel and transport programs;
- iii) To achieve integrated planning and rational allocation of resources;
- iv) To promote sustainable rural and transport infrastructure;
- v) To increase the availability of and improve access to means of travel and transport and
- vi) To promote gender equity in the rural travel and transport.

Activities under the program focus, in particular on evolving policies and strategies and appropriate implementation instruments.

The intended beneficiaries of MRTTP are rural communities which will, through improved access and mobility, be able to much more readily use the social and economic services and facilities available. They will also benefit through increased use of appropriate means of travel and transport. Ministries/Departments and organizations involved in Rural Travel and Transport will also benefit through the policy reforms and enabling environment for co-ordination created by the program.

2 POLICY FRAMEWORK

Malawi drafted a rural transport policy document in 1996 out of the experiences gained through the implementation of various pilot projects. Prior to this policy document, most of the rural transport interventions were initiated, planned and executed by respective line ministries and other organizations without proper co-ordination and complementarity. The draft policy document, which is a subset in National Transport Policy, is vital since it clearly spells out the overall goal, objectives, instruments/strategies, institutional framework and the rationale of the rural travel and transport policy.

The draft Rural Transport Policy aims at providing the framework within which the rural travel transport sub-sector can be developed in a well co-ordinated manner and ensures that interventions complement each other rather than duplicating or even conflicting with one another. In addition, the policy is geared towards promoting and ensuring that rural transport activities are implemented by the Government, the private sector and non-governmental organizations bearing in mind the relevant investment policies, sectoral goals within clearly spelt out guidelines regarding investment, institutional regulatory mechanisms, pricing, cost recovery principles and issues such as gender and safety.

2.1 Specific Objectives of Rural Transport Policy

The following are the objectives of the RTP:

- a) Improvement of accessibility of rural people to socio-economic services and facilities such as hospitals, schools, markets, water sources, grinding mills, etc.;
- b) Promoting an integrated approach to rural transport planning and execution of rural transport interventions;
- c) Ensuring that transport safety standards are enforced in rural areas to minimize the loss of life and goods through accidents; and
- d) Reduction of gender imbalance against females in undertaking rural transport activities.

2.2 Rural Transport Policy Strategies

As part of the process of achieving the RTP objectives, the GoM will put in place several strategies. The strategies will be guided by the following three principles:

- a) Transport interventions will in particular, target disadvantaged communities.
- b) Ensuring that planning of road and waterway infrastructure and services

- accommodate the requirements of non-motorized transport means
- c) Communities will actively be involved at all levels in the identification and implementation of rural transport interventions.

2.3 Investment Strategies

- a) Fiscal policy measures on rural transport activities will be continually reviewed whenever necessary to stimulate the development of rural transport industry;
- b) Investment and ownership of rural transport means shall be encouraged in the local communities through provision of the necessary incentives;
- c) Technical assistance shall be selectively provided to rural artisans for training in appropriate rural transport technologies;
- d) Government shall promote the establishment of credit facilities to enable entrepreneurs procure transport means, manufacture and maintain them;
- e) Government shall encourage civic education within local communities for continued participation in self-help activities with the aim of improving maintenance by creating a sense of ownership;
- f) Capacity building in rural transport will be encouraged at all levels and supported by GoM and the private sector;
- g) Women and girls shall be encouraged to invest and take part in the decision making process relating to rural transport matters.

2.4 Regulatory Strategies

- a) The Road and Marine Traffic Acts shall be reviewed to take into account all the rural transport policy issues;
- b) Equal access to credit among women and men shall be promoted in the rural set up;
- c) Legislation shall be introduced to include non-motorized transport as part of the normal traffic on roads of Malawi;
- d) Pick-ups and any other fare paying passenger vehicles will be subjected to minimum safety standards as shall be stipulated in the amended Road Traffic Act;
- e) Vehicle axle load limits shall be strictly enforced on rural roads to avoid degradation of the rural road infrastructure;
- f) Government shall ensure use of appropriate standards in road infrastructure construction, rehabilitation and maintenance to minimize environmental degradation and accidents.

2.5 Pricing Strategies

Investment in rural transport shall be encouraged through the promotion of competition to avoid cartels and collusion on fare charges and freight rates. In order to facilitate this:

- a) Government shall continue monitoring the effects of liberalization on fares and freight rates to ensure positive contribution to rural transport development;
- b) Government shall work out the vehicle operating costs to effectively review the rural transport policies;
- c) Competition among the rural transporters shall be encouraged to stabilize the fare charges and freight rates.

3 INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

The Rural Travel and Transport sub-sector encompasses transport infrastructure (rural roads, tracks, trails, river crossings and paths), motor vehicles and transport services, and non-motorized means of transport. It also incorporates the physical access of rural people to basic goods, services and facilities. Rural transport activities are carried out by various institutions in both Government and the private sector. In this respect, the rural transport strategies and interventions will be implemented by all the relevant institutions countrywide.

At the district level line ministries/departments implement rural transport strategies through their district offices and also through District Development Committees (DDC), Area Development Committees (ADC) and Village Development Committees (VDC) which are local level planning and implementation units. The latter units also facilitate community participation in the planning and implementation of development projects and will be replaced by an elected District Assembly, Area Assembly and Ward Assembly, respectively as the new decentralization policy is being implemented. However, capacity at the district level is very limited and there are efforts underway to develop capacity to plan and manage development programs.

3.1 Other Capacity Issues

Investment in the transport sector in Malawi has traditionally concentrated on the building of infrastructure for road, air and rail services serving commercial, urban and district centres with little attention to the improvement of rural transport systems. This has led to an imbalance in investment in the transport industry. Rural transport has been marginalized hence the lack of financing for the sub-sector.

In order to correct this, a coherent rural transport planning and implementation approach was initiated in 1994 with the launching of the Malawi Government and UNDP 5th Country Program. The Pilot Integrated Rural Transport Project (PI RTP) together with the Rural Motorized Transport Project (RMTP), the Village Access Roads and Bridges Assistance Unit (VARBAU) and the Rural Transport Co-ordination Unit formed the Rural Transport Component of Program III (Social Development) in the GoM/UNDP 5th Country Program. This effort led to improvements in the collection of data on rural transport problems/issues and the development of Integrated Rural Accessibility Planning (IRAP) tool for planning interventions to address existing problems.

The Government has in the process also recognized the fact that the lack of adequate funds to finance RTT programs is one of the many factors impeding progress in redressing the imbalance and more specifically the development of the RTT sub-sector. To date, assistance has been provided by some donors and collaborating partners to set on course any substantial improvements and investments in the sub-sector. However, sustainability remains a problem because of lack of capacity and reliable sources of revenue for maintenance of the roads and transport infrastructure. The creation of the National Roads Authority (NRA) and a Road Fund for maintaining the road network including access roads, trails, tracks and footpaths promises a bright future.

Equally important is the implementation of the Decentralization Policy, which will deconcentrate functions and devolve powers to local authorities through the creation of elected District Assemblies, Area Assemblies and Ward Assemblies. The decentralization policy will provide the legal framework for re-arranging rural development priorities and creating an enabling environment for the creation and provision of RTT infrastructure and services. Without this framework, there is no appropriate representation at the grass-root level to adequately articulate rural travel and transport problems and to build local capacity on a sustainable basis.

4 CONCLUSION

At the end of the program it is envisaged that rural travel and transport as a sub-sector will have been promoted through an enhanced awareness and understanding of the Rural Travel and Transport Programs. Secondly, a Policy and Institutional Framework on rural travel and transport will have been established. This will involve amongst others, the adoption by the Government of Malawi of the National Transport Policy, review of the Transport Act and the establishment of a framework for the implementation of MRTTP. Thirdly, the Program will institutionalize integrated planning and the rational allocation of resources through the implementation of the district planning system throughout the country and the establishment of mechanisms for capital and recurrent funding for rural travel and transport interventions.

Currently, there are four key institutions/ministries involved in the planning, development and implementation of rural transport programs, namely the National Economic Council (NEC), Ministry of Transport (MOT), Ministry of Works (MoW) and Department of District and Local Government Administration (DDLGA). At the grass-root level these ministries work through the District Development Committees (DDCs), the Area Development Committees (ADCs) and the Village Development Committees (VDCs). This is a top-down centralized planning structure which is not ideal bearing in mind the fact that transport needs and requirements at the community level are diverse and central planners, find it difficult to appreciate these divergent needs and aggregate them to satisfy the general rural transport requirements. Secondly, because of the complexity of the rural transport network, it is difficult for central government to gather and process information for planning purposes. Thirdly, resources take a long time to move from central government to the community level and this affects effectiveness of the programs. Lastly, where non-transport interventions are required to improve accessibility, such issues may not be easily recognized at the central level because of ineffective and inefficient inter-sectoral consultations.

In order to overcome problems inherent in the top down centralized structure, the MRTTP will for the most part assign responsibilities for the implementation of the program activities to grassroot organizations at community level. This will be supported centrally through policy guidance and co-ordination by the Department of District and Local Government Administration.

This case study is taken from the Malawi Rural Travel and Transport Program document, Government of the Republic of Malawi (1999).