

## ***5. Potential for Increasing Bicycle Usage and Alleviating the Transport Burden of Women***

This case study investigates the current and potential role of bicycles both for personal travel and movement of goods, and the commercial role of bicycles in providing transport services in eastern Uganda. Its particular focus is on the potential for greater use of bicycles by women and for women's activities, and on women's priorities for interventions to improve mobility and access.

The key findings are presented in the section below. The subsequent section deals with ways to increase bicycle usage, the one following that with additional ways of improving local transport in eastern Uganda, and the last section with aspects of concern regarding projects aiming to involve rural women.

### ***5.1 Key Findings and Issues***

#### ***Bicycle Usage***

Traffic counts in Mbale and Tororo district show that bicycles are the largest vehicle category on all roads. The VLTTS indicates that the poorer the road conditions and the steeper the terrain, the smaller the proportion of external trips households do by bicycle. However, the VLTTS traffic counts indicate that the poorer the road infrastructure, the higher the proportion of bicycles employed for commercial load-carrying purposes. Most of the bicycles in these areas were operated by rural traders. Village people can sell their surplus crops to these bicycle traders. Thus, through the existence of bicycle transport services, markets are extended to a large proportion of the rural population. Another somewhat more urban type of transport service is provided by boda-boda bicycles which can be hired for both personal and goods transport.

Bicycles are mainly used by men for external travel purposes - most commonly for going to markets or for running errands. Bicycle usage positively impacts on the well-being of a household by facilitating access to economic and social services such as markets and health clinics. If bicycles were also used for internal transport activities, their potential impact on household welfare would be greater since the time and effort spent on these activities would be reduced.

In all cases where bicycles or other intermediate means of transport were employed for women's transport activities, they were used by men. The increased availability of bicycles and other IMT could facilitate the transfer of transport responsibilities from women to men, and thereby alleviate some of the transport burden placed on women.

### ***Bicycles and Rural Women***

Currently, very few rural women ride bicycles for the following reasons:

- (i) Culturally, this may not be accepted. In certain societies, women who ride bicycles are perceived "to behave like men." Husbands in particular may feel that the extra mobility a woman would get from having a bicycle could make women "too liberated," and they would no longer know where their wives were or what they were doing.
- (ii) Bicycles are generally used for travel outside the village while women's transport responsibilities take place in and around the village.
- (iii) The existing load-carrying devices on bicycles make it difficult to transport water, firewood and crops over poor footpaths.
- (iv) Bicycles are generally considered a man's possession, and men are reluctant to lend them out to women. The men fear that the bicycle can break and result in expensive repairs if used for women's transport activities. It is more likely that men lend out their bicycles for the same activities for which they themselves use the bicycles.
- (v) Women have limited access to money. Men are generally responsible for monetary transactions and for decisions involving monetary outlays.

However, women are anxious to improve their situation and, in the flatter areas of eastern Uganda, they could use bicycles to alleviate their transport burden.

### ***5.2 Ways to Encourage Greater Use of Bicycles by Men and Women***

Increased bicycle usage will enhance mobility among rural people by providing both a means of personal and goods transport to bicycle owners, and an extension of transport services. A greater use of bicycles among both men and women in Eastern Uganda would increase transport efficiency and facilitate access to social and economic services. Bicycle usage could be encouraged through:

- (i) Cultural change;
- (ii) Technical improvements;
- (iii) Credit programs; and
- (iv) Improvements of roads and footpaths.

#### ***Cultural Change***

In areas where it is not considered proper for women to ride bicycles, change would have to be introduced slowly and cautiously in order not to offend traditional beliefs. Meetings and seminars need to be held with village leaders and with local men and women in order to gain support for a project.

Educated women such as teachers and nurses could act as initial agents for change. However, one should be careful not to propagate the idea of bicycles being vehicles exclusively for women with higher status. Therefore, a conscious effort should be made to involve more typical village women.

It is also possible that a modified ladies' bicycle (equipped with a carrying device designed for the transport of water, firewood and crops) could help to overcome cultural constraints which attribute masculinity to women who ride bicycles.

### ***Technical Improvements***

A previous study<sup>6</sup> has identified three priorities for the technical adaptation of bicycles to improve load-carrying capacity.

- (i) Strengthening the rear wheels to reduce the frequency of breakage. Since bicycles are employed in eastern Uganda to carry heavy loads, damage to spokes and rims are common occurrences.
- (ii) A simple 2-speed gearing system to facilitate rural load carrying. The single gear-ratio on existing bicycles in eastern Uganda is rather high, and a lower fitted second gear would make transport on poor roads and tracks easier.
- (ii) A 2-wheeled cycle trailer to enable, in the flatter areas, bulkier and heavier loads to be transported. Its use would be restricted not only by terrain and road conditions, but also by market size. In order to justify the investment in the trailer, the owner would have to generate a higher financial return.

It would also be desirable to:

- (i) Incorporate local needs and priorities into the designs produced by domestic bicycle manufacturers, such as at the planned bicycle factory at Banda outside Kampala (a private Ugandan-Chinese joint venture). For example, all bicycles in eastern Uganda are currently fitted with wide rear carrying racks manufactured by local blacksmiths. If new bicycles were equipped with these or similar racks already at the factory, the cost to the buyer is likely to be lower as well as resulting in racks of better quality and design.
- (ii) Extend the load-carrying capacity of bicycles to allow for easier transport of water, firewood, and crops. This would result in an increase in the potential use of bicycles for women's transport activities;
- (iii) Introduce a sturdy ladies' bicycle of a smaller size to help overcome the difficulties experienced by women of relatively small stature in keeping their balance on men's bicycles. Women riding ladies' bicycles may also face fewer cultural constraints.

### ***Credit Programs***

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<sup>6</sup> Barwell, Ian. 1991. Op. cit.

Credit is a factor that was mentioned in every discussion throughout the visit. The interest in bicycles is widespread in the flat areas of eastern Uganda, but potential buyers face major difficulties in accumulating sufficient cash to purchase a bicycle.

The affordability of a bicycle for the rural household depends on the household's income level, and on its ability to save. The real income of rural households is in steady decline, since inflation increases at a higher rate than crop prices. As a result, the rural household's ability to save is decreasing as a larger proportion of income is being spent on daily necessities. Furthermore, bicycles are currently imported, and due to the depreciating Ugandan shilling, bicycle prices are increasing. The bicycle price/income ratio is thus widening, which negatively affects the affordability of a bicycle for rural people.

Most rural bicycle owners have acquired their bicycles in conjunction with a large sale of cash crops, and few of them have saved for the purchase over longer periods of time. The provision of credit to households with modest earnings ought, therefore, to allow for the credit period to extend over two or three harvest periods, as income flow is related to large sales of crops.

The availability of credit for bicycle purchases could also encourage investment in bicycle-related business activities, such as rural trading and boda-boda. The credit decision (and assessment of loan repayment) would be made on the basis of the future income-generating capacity of the bicycle activity. Bicycle transport operators would thus pay back their loans with the income generated directly by their investment.

Discussions were held with the General Manager of Uganda Women's Finance and Credit Trust Ltd. (UWFCT) in Kampala and with the regional coordinator for the Eastern Province in Mbale about the design and implementation of a credit scheme for the purchase of bicycles or other IMT targeted for rural women. UWFCT has an organization for the training of women's groups who wish to undertake income-generating activities. Before an individual or a women's group is granted a loan, it has to open a bank account and learn the concept of saving.

UWFCT recognizes transport as a major constraint on women's time and also on the success of many income-generating projects. It would therefore consider cooperating with a transport project by lending its expertise for the training components as well as for the technical aspects of the credit scheme.

The general manager of UWFCT suggested that the credit for the purchase of bicycles should be granted to women's groups, and that the groups should be responsible for the repayments of individual members. The loans could work as revolving funds both within the individual women's group and within the UWFCT. Women's groups could, for example, be allowed to borrow a multiple of their deposits, or alternatively, only qualify for loans after they have reached a pre-established minimum level of savings.

Many of the institutional representatives and key informants interviewed emphasized the advantage of lending to groups rather than to individuals. Women are very committed to their groups, and would not wish to damage their reputation with the group. Thus, the "policing" of the loans to individuals would be taken care of by each group. UWFCT would be responsible for training, disbursement and the receipt of interest payments and principal of the loan.

Although the overall structuring and monitoring of credit schemes could be carried out through women's groups, their potential success depends also on how the sensitive issue of interest payments is handled. Farmers find it difficult to understand why commercial interest rates are 40-50 percent. UWFCT is a self-sustaining entity and therefore has to charge commission for its services and commercial interest rates for its loans. If a project wishes to lend money at interest rates below market rates, UWFCT would still be able to collaborate on the credit scheme (although the difference between the market rate and the subsidized rate would have to be covered by project funds). However, once the project ended, it would no longer be a sustainable scheme. Either market interest rates would have to be charged, or the funds would be depleted over time.

There are many international donor agencies interested in cooperating with UWFCT, because it has been successful in reaching women. There is a risk, however, that it may become overburdened or grow too fast, and this would negatively influence its managerial capacity and implementation skills. The General Manager did not think that this would happen, although she agreed that UWFCT is being approached by many organizations.

Overall, there are many projects in Uganda which are considering the use of revolving funds. Before a credit scheme for bicycles is designed, the successes, failures, and problems of these credit schemes ought to be studied.

### ***Improvements of Roads and Footpaths***

The improvement of feeder roads and footpaths would have a beneficial effect on the load-carrying capacity of bicycles. Considering the scarce financial resources at the district level, feeder road rehabilitation is likely to be given priority while improvements to footpaths and tracks will essentially have to be carried out on a self-help basis. Such a project would have to rely on a participatory approach for implementation. Its degree of effectiveness would, to a large extent, depend upon the priorities and perceived needs of the rural communities, and on the technical and social skills of the project staff.

## **5.3 *Alternative Ways to Improve the Local Transport System***

### ***Intermediate Means of Transport***

Different types of IMT would be suitable, depending on the transport task, household income, topography, road and track standards, farming systems, culture and traditions, local resources, and technical capabilities of the area. In addition to bicycles, wheelbarrows and handcarts, oxen, cows, and donkeys were identified as IMT whose current use could be extended. These IMT are within the technical capabilities of rural communities, and through credit schemes, could become financially viable for households in eastern Uganda.

### ***Non-Transport Interventions***

Transport efficiency, in terms of the weight of the load related to the time spent on transport, can also be enhanced through the provision of facilities such as water supply systems and grinding mills. In many areas of eastern Uganda, women would prefer a closer water source or a grinding

mill rather than an IMT. The provision of a closer facility would clearly reduce the transport element per unit carried of water and grains, although there is still likely to be a transport component involved in these activities. On occasion facilities also break down (and their repair may be delayed), and as a result people are forced back into their old transportation modes in order to get water and flour.

The reduced consumption of and reliance on firewood would also save time and energy spent on to transport. The introduction of wood stoves with low fuel consumption or of alternative energy sources, such as solar power or methane gas, could alleviate some of the burden. The planting of woodlots would prevent further deforestation, and, in the long run, could help eliminate the need to travel large distances to obtain wood.

Currently, there are few health clinics in the rural areas of eastern Uganda. As a result, a great deal of effort is spent transporting sick people to the nearest health facility. The addition of more stationary clinics, or alternatively mobile clinics, could alleviate this transport burden. However, in order for this to be a feasible alternative, higher salaries, among other things, must be offered to medical professionals in order to give them incentives to continue practicing.

#### **5.4    *Ways to Reach the Rural Women***

In order to ensure women's participation in development programs there has generally to be a specific women's component which addresses their situation and consequent involvement. In many traditional societies, as well as in eastern Uganda, women do not feel comfortable voicing their opinions, or do not speak freely in the presence of men. In these situations, a typical village meeting with both men and women becomes fruitless in its attempt to seek a dialogue with women to learn more about their situation and priorities. It is, however, important that men are informed about the meetings that the women attend in order to eliminate unnecessary suspicion. Men could also, on occasion, be invited to attend. The problem here is if women become too intimidated to speak up, or the men "take over" by answering on behalf of the women.

In villages where there already are established women's organizations, it is advisable to work through these groups and avoid setting up parallel structures. Currently, in Mbale district there are about 500 women's organizations registered with the Community Development Office. However, only a small number of them are active. Most of the groups are open to all women in the village or in the parish. Some of the more active women's groups are, however, project specific, such as women's cooperatives or projects directed to a certain segment of the female population (as is the case with religious groups).

The government's Minister for Women in Development, Culture, and Youth, indicated that in the near future women's councils will be formed in villages as a complementary women's forum to the Resistance Committees. In RCs there has to be one women's representative at all levels. Women are also eligible for other posts on the RCs, even if in reality, the only woman commonly on the RC is the obligatory women's representative. In addition to the obligatory women's delegate, in 1989 only 3 of the 160 representatives from the various districts were women.<sup>7</sup> The need for a special structure

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<sup>7</sup> Hannan Andersson, Carolyn. 1985. Op. cit.

where women can express and interchange opinions freely is the main reason for establishing the women's councils. When a project approaches a village for the first time, these women's councils would be a natural first contact, an important point of reference, and a source of information.

When a project or a visitor wishes to hold a meeting not only with women leaders but also with ordinary village women, it is important to announce the visit a few days in advance in order for the message not to be restricted to the most well-connected women. It is generally more difficult to communicate with average village women than with the more articulate, educated women leaders. The typical village woman is likely to speak a local language, and she may not be used to verbalizing her thoughts and ideas. This means that the process will be considerably slower - requiring more visits and more logistic work. However, it is important to follow a slower pace in order to understand the situation of the majority of the rural women, and to avoid the perception that a project is "elitist."

The meeting should preferably be held at a time when it least interferes with the women's daily schedule in order to minimize obstruction and potential criticism from husbands. Women generally go to the fields in the mornings, after the older children have gone off to school. If meetings are called between 10 o'clock to 1 o'clock, the attendance is likely to be very poor. This is not because women are not interested but because they simply do not have the time to attend. If they were to come to the meeting they would not be able to go to the fields that day. Hence, they must be informed at least two days in advance in order for them to have brought sufficient food home the previous day.

When the women go home from the fields, they have to prepare a meal for their families. If the meeting is called at this time, the women are likely to be criticized by their husbands for behaving irresponsibly by giving priority to women's "get-togethers" and leaving the children hungry. An early notice of the meeting will enable the women to plan ahead and make arrangements to avoid this situation. In eastern Uganda, the best time for women to attend meetings was between 2 p.m. and 3 p.m. Women frequently mentioned that when they go to meetings they rarely know in advance what the subject of the meetings is likely to be. It would be easier for women to get permission from their husbands to attend meetings if they could account for the purpose and the character of the meeting. Organizations may send out detailed information about meetings to village officials, but it is likely that these officials only pass on small parts of the information to the households.

In addition, when the women return home from meetings, husbands tend to expect them to bring some type of present back from the meeting (ignoring the fact that the men themselves rarely bring anything from their meetings). Many of the groups visited mentioned this issue. There seems to have been in the past a project or an organization which offered "presents" at meetings, which may have given rise to these expectations. Husbands may ridicule their wives, or forbid them from going to more meetings simply because they did not come back with "something."

This is a dilemma which partially stems from the short-run and the long-run perspective on the returns on the time invested in meetings. In the short run, a meeting may be of a fact-finding or informative nature and therefore appears to bring no return. In the long run, gatherings may give rise to activities or projects for the social and/or economic benefit of the communities. The women did, however, understand the problems related to people only attending meetings motivated by the belief that "presents" will be given out, and that this practice and attitude would undermine any

project lacking outside funding. It is also important that project staff clearly communicate the scope and potential activities of their projects. They also need to give the communities a realistic time frame. Life in the rural areas is very hard and the possibility of an improvement is greeted with enthusiasm and hope. People frequently complained about having been promised project activities or inputs which never materialized. They were left uninformed and eventually disillusioned. This situation could be prevented by maintaining an open and clear dialogue between visiting organizations, projects and the local communities.

*Notes on discussion checklist:*

Design of Questionnaire:

1. The questionnaire is intended to serve as a base of discussion rather than a script to be read out or followed strictly. It is desirable to aim to create a comfortable feeling of exchange rather than questioning in order for the women to speak their mind.
2. The order of the questions may appear illogical or scattered, but the questionnaire has purposely been designed to encourage women to give their own opinion and reveal their preferences and not try to "second guess" what a "potential project" may be interested in. One specific objective of the case study was women and bicycles. Questions focusing directly on bicycles have been assigned to the latter part of the questionnaire in order to avoid the impression that the visitors have a preference for this means of transport.
3. Question 10 is the same as Q.4. The reason for this is to get a feel for if women's opinions are firm in the sense that they have thought about the problem and its solution thoroughly already prior to this meeting or if their preferences have changed/matured/become more realistic during the course of the discussion.
4. Question 12 c. has been included to get insight into what area women give priority to if and when they have money.
5. All of the questions need not necessarily be asked on every occasion. Sometimes prior information or comments render a question excessive.
6. Depending on the answers, some of the questions may on occasion require further investigation. Every discussion should be permitted to be different and to be conducted according to the circumstances in the surrounding area.

*Checklist for Women's Group Discussion*

Village:

Parish:

Sub-county:

County:

No. of women present:

Age range:

Note: The discussion should be preceded by a brief introduction explaining that this is a fact finding mission and not a project. The purpose of the visit is to find out what women's transport situation is like, what their priorities are, and how projects should be organized in order to assure women's participation.

1. a. Which is your most time consuming/effort involving task?  
  
Transport task?  
How often?  
Travel time o/w?
- b. How could it be alleviated?
- c. What would you do with the time (and energy) you save if this transport element were reduced/you did not have to perform the transport task?
2. a. Do you use/hire any IMT to reduce transport burdens? Give example.
  - i) What do you transport?
  - ii) How often?
  - iii) How long does it take o/w?/How far is it?
- b. Do you use/hire any bicycle transport device?
  - i) Purpose -- Personal movement or goods?
  - ii) How often?
  - iii) Where to?
  - iv) How much does it cost?
3. a. What would the benefits be from improved roads/footpath network?
- b. Would you participate on a self help basis/paid basis?
- c. Would men mind if women work on roads?

4. What are your priorities for improvements in the transport system? (IMT/roads/ tracks/non-transport interventions?)
5.
  - a. Do you own a bicycle?
  - b. Is there any bicycle in your household?
    - i) Who uses it?
    - ii) Purpose?
    - iii) How often?
    - iv) Where to?
    - v) How long does it take?/How far is it?
    - vi) Do you rent it out?
      - \* Charge
      - \* To whom
      - \* Purpose
      - \* Frequency
6. Can you ride a bicycle?
  - i) When did you last ride?
  - ii) Where did you learn how?
  - iii) Why do not more women ride bicycles?
  - iv) How could use of bicycles be encouraged?
  - v) What do men think of women who ride bicycles?
  - vi) What do women think of women who ride bicycles?
7.
  - a. Do you know any woman who has/rides a bicycle?
    - i) Purpose?
    - ii) How often?
    - iii) Where to?
    - iv) How long does it take?/How far is it?
    - v) Age of woman?
    - vi) Age of bicycle?
    - vii) How long has she had the bicycle?
    - viii) How did she acquire it?
    - xi) What type of bicycle is it?
    - x) Does her husband have a bicycle/another vehicle?
      - \* Do men let women use their vehicles?
  - b. Do you know of any household where the woman rides but not the man?
8.
  - a. If you had a bicycle what would you use it for?

- i) How often?
    - ii) How far?
  - b. Would you let other people use it?
  - c. Would you rent it out/?engage in transport services?
  - d. Would/could you use it for water/firewood/crop from field transport?
    - i) Are conditions of footpaths a constraint to extended usage?
      - \* Could they be improved?
  - e. Would there be a risk that men/sons would monopolize the bicycle for their travel needs if there were only one in the household?
    - i) Would this risk exist for other IMT?
9. Possibility of men taking over transport responsibilities/burden if IMT available?
10. Which transport problems would you like to see addressed first? (IMT/roads/tracks/non-transport interventions?)
11. How should a project which wishes to address your priority go about doing it in order to assure:
- i) women's participation?
  - ii) women's benefit?
  - iii) sustainability?
12. a. How much does a bicycle cost?
- b. Why do you not have a bicycle?
- c. If you had the above mentioned amount of money, what would you buy? (clothing, a mattress, a radio, a cow, a sewing machine (together with someone else), an IMT?)
- d. If credit were available for bicycle purchases, would you buy?
  - i) How frequent should instalments be?  
(monthly/bimonthly/quarterly/twice a year)
  - ii) How much could you pay per instalment?

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