

A regular series of notes highlighting recent lessons emerging from the operational and analytical program of the World Bank's Latin America and Caribbean Region.



## Gender in Peru: Can women be integrated into transport projects?

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The Rural Roads Project (2001-2006), RRP, was a good practice example in a number of ways, not least with respect to gender equality. It included 12 of the poorest departments (50 percent of the country), and the rehabilitation and maintenance of 15,000 kilometers of rural roads by routine rural maintenance micro-enterprises, whose management has been fully transferred to local and regional governments. Improvement works were also carried out on 7,000 kilometers of bridle paths, an informal means of rural transport mostly used by women and children.

In addition to the impacts on rural poverty reduction and improvements in transport conditions (access to markets, health, education, etc.), the project's decentralization and institutional strengthening component produced other outcomes such as improved access to information and greater transparency and accountability. People in the affected area have been empowered to exercise their civil rights, including democracy and the project has encouraged cooperation, the forming of associations, and participation; and finally, contributed to civic mindedness among rural inhabitants. Gender was a factor throughout the project and was included in the objectives,. In this regard, as in so many others, this project surpassed its expected goals.

### Rural Peruvian Women

Women constitute 49.2 percent of Peru's rural population, and their reality is very similar to many rural women worldwide: overwork without remuneration, limited participation in decision making, lack of control over, and access to, resources, illiteracy, and low self-



esteem. The reality of the Peruvian woman lies in domestic violence and the political and social violence experienced in the country in past decades which, together with other factors, led to 20 percent of women being heads of households. When rural women earn a salary in the agricultural sector, it is less than that of rural men, and even then, the entirety of their income is spent to support their households.

### Road Accessibility

Small, appropriately focused rural infrastructure interventions can contribute to the well-being of women and their families. First, the project made physical access easier by integrating rural communities into road networks and the socioeconomic system, thereby contributing to the reduction of opportunity costs of women's time and opening up opportunities for their mobility. Second, as salaried members of the rural maintenance micro-enterprises, women also had access to economic resources, which had a positive impact on the well-being of their households. Third, women were active participants in the public consultations and also benefited from access to the decision-making process, generating a sense of civic pride and self-confidence.

### Women's Voices Heard

The main achievement of the Rural Roads Project with regard to gender issues was the improvement of the bridle paths.

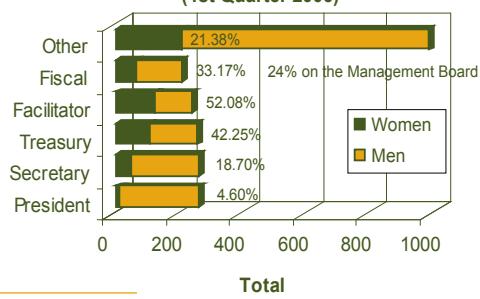
This was not simply a result of female representation on the Rural Road Committees (See Figure 1), which were the road rehabilitation crews, but also because



What shame to dress in a helmet and vest! Everyone in the village laughed at me, saying I looked really ugly in the garb of a man and with a helmet like the head of a worm. And my bones ached, my hands blistered and I felt self conscious working among men in the middle of the road and I had a hard time getting up early. But soon, everything stopped hurting and I found my courage. I started leaving my house with my head held high - who cares about what people may say if I have a job that feeds my children!

during the participatory process of prioritizing roads to be improved, women, being the most frequent users of this type of road, enthusiastically expressed themselves and described how the lack of accessibility and transport services had impeded them in their daily lives. In addition, their basic needs were taken into consideration.

**Figure 1 - Rural Roads Committees: Composition by Gender, indicating the number of women (1st Quarter 2006)**



### Methodology

At the beginning of the project, only 4 percent of members of routine road maintenance micro-enterprises [Microempresas de Mantenimiento Vial Rutinario MEMVRs] were women. At that point, a “gender matrix” was drafted, setting out an overview in different areas: family, community, micro-enterprises, and institutions. In addition, it projected some desirable goals, and showed available resources and the requirements for achieving those goals. Although only partly operationalized, the matrix provided a glimpse of the latent exclusion of women and the vision of gender equity.

Inclusion efforts were launched with the review of MEMVR procedures, terms of reference, manuals, and guides, with the aim of detecting and eliminating requirements that restricted female participation, as well as broadening recruitment and providing incentives for hiring men and women alike. Emphasis was placed on training and awareness-building with a focus on gender, conducting different training workshops and modules, one for MEMVR male and female micro-entrepreneurs, and another targeted toward operators of the project. Moreover, a Gender Action Plan was prepared and included its own budget, goals, such as the establishment of a percentage for female participation, objectives, such as gender equity, and follow-up through gender focal points. The ambitious objective of 10 percent female participation in micro-enterprises was comfortably surpassed at the end of the project, reaching 24 percent.

### Eligibility Criteria for Working in Micro-Enterprises

Some of the initial selection criteria for micro-entrepreneurs were as follows: applicants had to be literate, have experience in construction or masonry, and have leadership qualities and business qualifications or experience. To achieve gender equity, some were adapted while others were eliminated. Literacy was no longer a requirement, and socioeconomic criteria were included to give priority to women who head households, because they are usually the most economically disadvantaged. Experience in agricultural and domestic management tasks, in addition to active participation in associations, were taken into account in the selection processes. With the aim of attracting female candidates, the promotion and publicity of the work opportunity that was being presented with the MEMVRs specifically targeted women, as a demonstration that they were also capable of working in this sector. Moreover, the establishment of minimum participation quotas stipulating that 10 percent had to be women entrepreneurs ensured that there was no discrimination against women.

### Breaking the Mold

The peculiarities of rural communities, macho behavior, ignorance about women’s opinions, lack of information, shame and feminine modesty, and their lack of confidence, are a few of the gender barriers found

at the beginning of the project, mainly a result of the traditionally male-orientation of this sector. The project contributed to the process of social change in rural communities.

### **Female Colleagues: the Main Advantages**

In MEMVRs, women are encouraging transparency in cash management, building confidence and morale, promoting cleanliness and hygiene, camaraderie, and cooperation. Their high level of responsibility ensures and increases the quality of works, and stoppages during the work day are decreasing both in number and duration. Male colleagues have stopped drinking on the job and are better fed, because female colleagues maintain their domestic role within the work crews and usually take charge of meal preparation.

### **The “Working” Woman**

The traditional, general view of construction as being a male preserve hinders the inclusion of gender considerations in this sector. However, during the Rural Roads Project, women proved they were fully capable of carrying out the arduous road rehabilitation works, and successfully adapted to the work crews. In fact, with rare exceptions related to physical strength (for example, moving large stones), the tasks are very similar to agricultural work (see Figure 2). In mixed teams, the division of tasks by ability produces team synergies. In other words, women eventually carry out tasks for which

they are more qualified, including roadbed cleaning or sign maintenance, while men focus on the repair of “dry walls” (muros secos) or the canalization of watercourses.

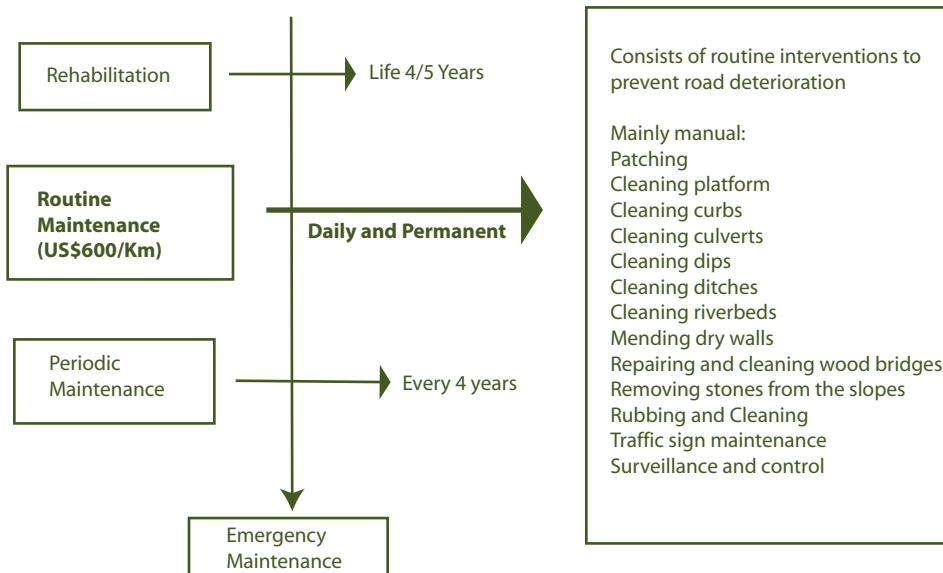
### **Empowerment of Women**

Owing to the fact that they often have limited resources, and fall victim to abuse from alcoholic husbands, domestic violence, and illiteracy, which stunts their personal development, rural women have little opportunities to escape their surroundings. These need to be nurtured by *ad hoc* programs. Interaction of women with groups outside of the domestic sphere was facilitated by their participation in MEMVRs and on Rural Road Committees. The salary they earned as MEMVR members gave them security and control of the economic resources that they used to make small purchases and the opportunity to establish small businesses for earning additional income to improve the welfare of their families.

### **Impact on Democracy**

Through its participatory processes involving women and by improving access, the RRP helped foster the active practice of democracy, a fact demonstrated during the last national elections where the increase in participation in departments where the RRP intervened was markedly higher than the national average (4 percent). This is illustrated in the table below. The case of women has been particularly successful, with a 13 percent increase in female votes in the department of Huancavelica.

**Figure 2 - Tasks Associated with Routine Road Maintenance**



Department	<i>Increase (2006 elections compared to 2002)</i>		
	Total	Hombres	Mujeres
<b>TOTAL PERU</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>4%</b>
Huancavelica	10%	7%	13%
Ayacucho	9%	7%	12%
Huanuco	7%	5%	9%
Apurímac	7%	6%	9%
Cusco	6%	5%	6%
Cajamarca	5%	5%	5%
Ancash	5%	4%	6%
Pasco	5%	4%	5%
Puno	4%	3%	4%
San Martín	4%	5%	4%
Junín	2%	1%	4%

### Impact on Citizens

While women living in the project area participate in the economic realities of their environment, they rarely participate in decision-making concerning community activities, this being especially true in the case of indigenous women. Sometimes because of a lack of formal education and self-esteem, and at other times because of their monolingualism (Quechua), rural women find it especially difficult to participate in the decision-making processes of their communities and to publicly express themselves. Providing incentives for the ongoing participation of women in all activities, both in those related to capacity-building in road maintenance, and in gender workshops and participatory consultations, helped to generate civic and political awareness among women. During one workshop in which rural women were participating, one of them commented, "I didn't know I had rights."

### Proviás Descentralizado: Betting on Social Inclusion

Proviás Descentralizado differs from other transport agencies because of the multidisciplinary nature of its staff complement, which includes engineers, economists, and sociologists, among others. The institutional will to integrate women into both its policies and projects was critical to the success of the gender initiative. Management, head office staff, staff in decentralized offices, and external promoters were sensitized and

trained in gender issues. Decentralized gender focal points who reported to a central focal point were established, and a team of gender specialists was retained throughout the project. In this manner, the project has promoted a culture of inclusion within the executing agency itself, and the commitment of its managers and professionals, as well as their competence and good performance, suggest that social inclusion efforts are likely to be maintained in the future.

### Achievements and Challenges: Sustainability

A number of challenges remain. It has been noted that when MEMVR staff numbers are cut, for whatever reason, women are the first to leave. In some cases women are so uncomfortable working on the roadways with men that they leave the job; in a few cases, they save and decide to invest in other income-generating activities. Moreover, the passage of time and the lack of reinforcement and follow-up, as well as incentive and sanction mechanisms, and the growing level of decentralization of responsibilities, functions, and resources toward local governments have led to a regressive trend in terms of women's participation in MEMVRs. As MEMVRs enter the free market, integration decisions will belong to the male or female recruits. However, it has equally been noted that women micro-entrepreneurs that continue working on the roadways in the long term as part of road maintenance crews have high levels of self-esteem and self-worth. Some MEMVRs are initiating shifts for women with economic difficulties and especially to allow single mothers to earn an income. The new Peruvian law on equal opportunities between men and women is an excellent tool to be used to ensure continuity of the gender equity efforts sparked by the Second Rural Roads Project.

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