

Rural transport solutions

Points from <http://www.animaltraction.org/> website.

The case for local transport solutions

- Rural people face many transport problems. They invest much time in essential transport tasks when they depend mainly on walking and carrying. This reduces the time available for more productive activities and reinforces their state of poverty.
- Many studies have shown how much time and effort are invested in basic transport, particularly by women. In sub-Saharan Africa, it has been estimated that women account for 70% of the time spent on transport and nearly 85% of the effort.
- Using intermediate means of transport for domestic tasks, including the movement of water, fuel and food, saves time and energy, particularly for women and children. The time and energy saved can improve the productivity and quality of life of rural households. Intermediate means of transport can assist access to markets, schools, health centers and other social and economic facilities.
- Transport stimulates agricultural production, bolstering trading of manure and fertilizers, crop residues and harvest.
- Intermediate means of transport stimulate greater trade, production and profit.
- Urban x rural: the development of local transport solutions is generally faster in urban areas, assisted by trade patterns, information flows, cultural diversity and year-round economic activity. A 'critical mass' of mutually-reliant transport users and support services develops quickly in towns so that innovation, assessment and adoption can be rapid. The use and diversity of local transport solutions is less in rural areas. This is particularly true in Sub-Saharan Africa. Processes of innovation and adoption take longer, affected by lower economic activity, lower availability of certain materials, fewer cultural exchanges, smaller information flows and higher seasonality of cash flows and transport demand.

Main points

- Transport increases access to markets, agricultural production and household productivity.
- There is a gap between rural and urban transport solutions.
- Women and children are particularly affected.

Challenges to be addressed

- Patterns of adoption not straightforward: population density, incomes, cultures, topography, climate, farming systems, transport needs and project activities all affect the success of promotional programs. Complex combinations of environmental and socio-economic factors, together with fickle human reactions, influence transport adoption.
- The 'old-fashioned' image of non-motorized means of transport limits acceptance, especially by young people.
- Many local transport solutions are cheap relative to motor options, but expensive relative to local incomes. High cost limits adoption. People who can purchase, through savings or credit, find intermediate means of transport are a good investment, due to the profitability of transport, marketing and hiring out.
- Women are the main transporters but men are the main users of intermediate means of transport. Gender-related constraints often limit women's access to local transport solutions for trade, production and domestic activities. Adding to that, male-orientated designs can constrain use by women and children.
- Understanding the many uses of transport devices.
- Recognizing the complementarity of transport solutions.
- There is need to develop a 'critical mass' of users to make ownership socially acceptable and to justify the establishment of service providers.
- The high transport demand around urban and rural markets stimulates the production and use of a wide range of complementary transport solutions. Rural programs promoting local transport solutions can stimulate the establishment of viable support services near important local markets.
- National governments and donor agencies have concentrated on road networks. Comparatively little money or time has been invested in the promotion of intermediate means of transport for rural people. There is a need to redress the imbalance and emphasize local transport interventions that benefit the majority or rural households.
- Some transport and accessibility problems can be solved without intermediate means of transport.

Learning from experience

- Some technologies spread 'spontaneously'.
- Adoption is not automatic.
- Women have special transport constraints.
- Transport empowers women. With improved access to transport, women can gain time, income, productivity, status and independence. Whole families may benefit through women's access to transport. In some societies, women gain particular benefits from donkeys that have few gender associations.
- Credit can assist the adoption of local transport solutions.

Main points

- Challenges to be addressed deal with context-specific!
- Rural x urban biased transport policies.
- Transport solutions must consider: (a) the current transport system and trading patterns; (b) the need of a critical mass of users, operators and suppliers.