

**A DISCUSSION NOTE ON WOMEN IN TRANSPORT IN AFRICA:
AFRICA INFRASTRUCTURE SYMPOSIUM**

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The challenge of urban and rural transport infrastructure development in Africa is enormous. A better appreciation of the contributions women can make to meet this challenge is needed. Alleviating the constraints on productive capacity imposed by the weak transport infrastructure is important; to do so will be easier if the problems male and female producers face in having access to transport services and aids are better understood. Women constitute the majority of the poor in Africa. They also produce the large bulk of agricultural output. A greater focus on them will enhance their productivity and will help them generate income through transport sector activities. It will also improve sector performances.

I cannot list or detail the diversity of gender issues which need consideration in the transport sector in the short space allowed me. Let me mention several.

1. First, there is the issue of research. In the past there has been little effort to integrate gender concerns in transport planning. Academic and policy oriented research on the subject is scarce and unreliable. Unless some research is funded, women's concerns in transport will continue to be neglected. Casual observations, occasional road user statistics, and gender specific labor statistics on road employment do not provide adequate information to address WID issues of the transport sector at large, and to estimate project impacts on women.

2. Secondly, there is the issue of policy and project focus. It is time to broaden the gender focus in the sector. To date the emphases has been restricted. It consists of the employment of women in feeder roads construction, the design and marketing of transport aids and of appropriate vehicles. There has also been some consideration of the productivity implications of time wasted by women with headloading of water and energy.

But there is so much more to consider. Think of the following: in many African cities women are rarely seen in public busses and yet urban poor women's labor force participation is high as is their dependencies on public transport. It is also uncommon to see women riding a bicycle or a motorcycle. Yet, women constitute a large proportion of small scale traders in rural and urban areas and could substantially benefit from having access to appropriate vehicles. Women car, truck or bus drivers are few in numbers.

To think that gender considerations can significantly increase the efficiency of public transport systems or railways is never heard of. In credit schemes dealing with the improvement of river transportation or with private sector involvement in road transport, mechanisms to facilitate women's access to credit are not considered. Yet an enterprising

mechanisms to facilitate women's access to credit are not considered. Yet an enterprising women's group in Kenya started their community development project through purchase and operation of a bus; now they are able to do much more.

Also rare is the consideration of social and economic constraints women face simply obtaining a driver's licence. It is not surprising that the Saudi women, who for many years accepted their exclusion from all aspects of social life, have publicly protested the ban of female drivers. In November, 1990 Saudi women, veiled except for their eyes, piled into cars for the drive through the capital in a daring act of protest. They are now being punished for their act.

Think also how heavily the families living in the U.S.A. rely on mother chauffeurs. The children of working mothers may be falling behind others in extra-curricular activities simply because the mothers are not available to drive them around. Consider also how the spatial organization of settlements rest on the availability of female drivers. Indeed, shopping malls would not have survived if women in America did not have the time and the means to drive.

Thus, there is ample room for gender considerations in all aspects of transport: railway projects, river transportation projects, urban transport planning, public transportation programs can all substantially benefit from the recognition of women as consumers and potential suppliers of relevant infrastructure and of transport services.

A focus on women in the context of feeder roads is surely justified but is insufficient to address the problems and constraints women face in other aspects of the transport sector. Since not just rural but all transport development efforts can benefit from women's contributions gender considerations ought to be made routinely in all types of transport projects.

3. A third issue is the recognition of women's contribution to transport. A major part of all transport for social and economic activities is undertaken by women. The time and effort women devote to transport has a high opportunity cost. However, the time women devote to transport and its potential economic value is underestimated.

Transportation of fuelwood and water are typically considered as time consuming drudgery for women. The transportation requirements for water are calculated exclusively on the basis of the time women spend carrying water from a source to the household. However, women spend far greater time transporting tasks, such as washing, to the water source rather than transporting water home to undertake these tasks. Therefore, a substantial portion of the transport burden and time with respect to water is omitted from calculations.

Many other transport responsibilities of women are also ignored. Transportation of farm inputs, produce and implements between the farm and the household, transport of children to the school and health centers are among these. Those relating to farming have direct bearing on agricultural productivity. But because roads are not used for this purpose the time and effort women put into transport activities between the farm and the household are seldom appreciated. As a result, remedies are not formulated.

Road availability will enhance women's productivity. Availability of means of transport, if accessible to women, will likewise lighten their burden. Equally important is the

availability of transport aids to reduce women's transport burden which takes place off-the-roads. In this context, participation of women in the design and dissemination of transport aids may be particularly fruitful.

4. Fourth, there is the issue of mode of participation. For poor communities, transport infrastructure development (be it roads, fishing docks, or other physical infrastructure), and the operation and maintenance of the existing infrastructure require a close partnership of the people and the local governments; unless women are brought into such partnership the success of community program will be jeopardized. For instance, when resources are scarce, the selection of roads or core networks for development and maintenance ought to be done with maximum care. The returns to investments can fall short of expectations if producers' needs and constraints are not fully understood. Since the majority of the rural producers in Africa are women, their needs ought to be assessed and incorporated in transport programs.

5. Strategies of women's contribution to sector activities is yet another issues. Women contribute significantly to the management of the built environment. In much of Africa, women undertake a large variety of construction and maintenance tasks. In transport projects, however, women's involvement is only considered as unskilled workers in labor intensive rural road construction. Their involvement in other capacities is ignored. While it is extremely important to mobilize women's labor for public works projects and to design employment intensive projects as a strategy for poverty alleviation, it is also advisable to institute mechanisms for long-term sustained involvement of women in the transport sector in other capacities, including as private sector contractors, vehicle operators, repair shop owners, managers, planners, and professionals.

Especially in Africa, women offer unique organizational skills which can be applied to infrastructure maintenance. Women have demonstrable experience as contractors; whether contracted in their individual capacity, or as members of informal groups or of formal firms, women meet their obligations successfully.

The list I have given about represents only a smattering of the issues. I have chosen these topics to demonstrate how diverse and far-reaching women's transportation issues are, and perhaps, to illustrate how these issues might pertain to the work being performed in the Bank.