



International Forum for Rural
Transport and Development



AFCAP



Developing indicators to assess rural transport services

New research study

The IFRTD in conjunction with Paul Starkey has been awarded a research contract by the African Community Access Programme (AFCAP) to develop and test indicators that can be used to assess how good rural transport services are at providing access for rural people. The envisaged outcome of the research will be appropriate rural transport services indicators that are tested and disseminated to the transport sector in various African countries. The research aims to identify, develop, test and share rural transport services indicators relevant to the key stakeholders, including rural people, transport operators, regulators, planners, roads authorities and development agencies. This will be achieved using participative methodologies involving local stakeholders and sector experts. Initial studies will be carried out in Kenya and Tanzania between April and September 2012. If the initial findings are encouraging, work will be extended to further African countries.

The context

Rural roads are vital for poverty reduction and economic development. However, in Africa, where most people do not own motorised means of transport, roads alone cannot meet the rural access needs of communities. People require transport services and/or means of transport for their livelihoods and to access markets, health services, education and numerous economic, social and civic opportunities.

People living in rural areas need transport between their homes and the various facilities and opportunities available in their local trading posts, market towns and district (or provincial) administrative centres. The road transport services that provide such access are crucial for poverty reduction, economic development and meeting the Millennium Development Goals. In a few countries, buses provide such services. More commonly smaller public transport vehicles cater for such demand, including midi-buses, minibuses, pickups, light trucks and/or cars. These are sometimes known as 'rural taxis'. These may be complemented by motorcycle taxis, bicycle taxis and animal powered transport.

The need for indicators

Transport ministries, roads authorities, donor agencies and the road construction industry all assume that publically-funded road construction and maintenance will enable private sector operators to run appropriate rural transport services. Road investments are justified by anticipated reductions in vehicle operating costs that will (it is assumed) lead to improved transport services. The crucial assumption that private operators will provide appropriate rural transport services in response to road investment is seldom verified, partly due to lack of agreed indicators of rural transport services. Indeed there are many examples in Africa of motorable roads that lack regular and predictable rural transport services.

Rural women, men, children and those with special needs will have opinions as to whether the transport services that link them to markets, employment, healthcare and services are sufficiently frequent, affordable, comfortable, safe and reliable. Those planning and implementing development investments require ways of measuring these parameters so they can compare access provision over time and distance, in order to monitor changes and prioritise interventions.

Rural Access Indicator

The World Bank's Rural Access Indicator (RAI) equates rural access to proximity (2 km) to a motorable road, ignoring transport services. This long-term development indicator is relatively 'unresponsive' to anything except motorable roads. The Rural Access Indicator is the same if the road two kilometres away is paved and has frequent, cheap transport services or is an eroded (but passable) track with one public transport truck a week charging high fares. Upgrading a rough track to a paved road does not affect this indicator despite people's greater access to markets, services and economic opportunities. There is need for another indicator that will complement the RAI and provide some means of assessing how rural transport services are meeting the access needs of rural populations.

Approach to Rural Transport Services indicators

The research team wish to identify and test indicators that can 'measure' rural transport services in ways meaningful to the key stakeholders. If practicable, the Rural Transport Indicators should be consistent and replicable and allow appropriate comparisons over time and space. They should be based on data that is easy to collect and should measure parameters that are relevant to the main stakeholders (passengers, operators, regulators). Key indicator components are likely to include actual passenger fares, frequency and journey time. If practicable, they should also reflect safety, security, reliability, predictability, accessibility and comfort, taking into account issues concerning gender, age, disability and socio-economic disadvantage. Other issues may include transport capacity, freight transport and alternative modes of transport.

Methodology

The team will develop a methodology for assessing rural transport services using participatory surveys undertaken in cooperation with a range of stakeholders in Kenya and Tanzania. Provisional indicators will be tested for reliability and relevance to the different stakeholders. Indicator applications for planning, monitoring and evaluation will be assessed with comparisons over time and space with collaborating partners. The research is planned to expand to further countries, as indicators are tested and validated with partner organisations.

Professional collaboration encouraged

The research team will be led by Paul Starkey (Team Leader) and Peter Njenga (Project Manager). Paul has many years of experience as an international consultant in rural transport. Peter is a transport planner and the Executive director of IFRTD. Team members include Dr Kenneth Odero, Dr Musyimi Mbathi and Guy Kentsop. All team members favour a collaborative, networking approach. An international Project Consultative Group will help to advise and guide the work. A website is being developed to share progress from the outset and gain feedback and ideas through comments and discussions.

People who have ideas or experience related to transport services and indicators, or who know of relevant documents, are encouraged to contact the Team Leader. Organisations in Africa working on rural transport are encouraged to collaborate with the team in the development and testing of the methodology and the use and validation of the preliminary indicators.

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