

PLANNING AND MANAGING RURAL ROADS

Developing Road Management Capabilities

Abstract:

The trends for some years in terms of managing rural roads in developing regions have been towards decentralising management capacities, increasing local and dedicated funding mechanisms, increasing private sector involvement and encouraging effective community participation. Road transport services are also no longer seen as a means in themselves but rather as a catalyst for achieving progress with most other development issues. Particularly rural roads projects are utilised as a vehicle to reach disadvantaged communities and to deal with development issues, such as good governance, environmental protection, gender equality, safety and health, entrepreneurship development, and other livelihood aspects.

To deal with these increasing challenges requires a management capacity at local level that is rarely available. At the same time the change by central Government departments from being the implementer to becoming the enabler involves handing over powers, responsibilities and resources to local authorities. However this is held back due to a number of (obvious) reasons. This creates serious areas of conflict and sector under-performance that need to be adequately addressed through a process of awareness creation, reforms, change management, creation of opportunities for all concerned and capacity building efforts.

Capacity development is therefore, besides allocation of resources, the biggest challenge and involves all levels and sector stakeholders. The central government agencies need to be able to cope with their new role as enabler while the local authorities have to develop their capacity to adequately manage district transport systems and works. The private sector takes over the execution of works and has to be locally established. Communities are increasingly involved in all stages of transport project management and implementation.

On the more practical side, road management at local level requires appropriate management and implementation systems to be in place. Reliable transport infrastructure inventories, condition survey, resource allocation guidelines and parameters, prioritisation systems and procedures, control and monitoring systems, just to name a few. These are systems that are often missing or if introduced are too complex or inappropriate to effectively utilise at local levels. Rational decision making with the involvement of communities is often hampered by lack of reliable data.

For the local private construction sector an enabling environment is the prerequisite for successful operations. Continuous training and mentorship provision are further requirements. At the same time the private construction sector is usually poorly organised and is often not viewed as a vital partner in building sustainable sector capacity. Functional associations do not exist or do not fulfil their role as development agencies for their members.

It is evident that far more attention is required to be paid to identifying the diverse needs, resourcing and facilitating the improvements in road management capacity.