
FOREWORD

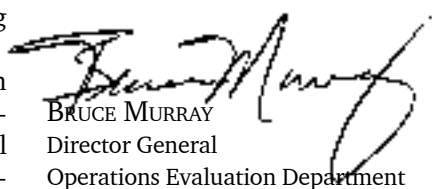
Participatory poverty assessments have long identified remoteness and isolation as critical components of poverty. Although it is widely assumed that investments in rural roads reduce poverty, there is little evidence of the ways in which these impacts occur or what their determinants are. Through the collection of empirical evidence from a cluster of case studies drawn from past Asian Development Bank operations, the study addressed this void. The objective of the study was to be an input for the improvement of the design of rural road components to achieve sustainable benefits for the poor. The study focused narrowly and deeply on selected case study villages within a project area, enabling an understanding of the factors that influence impacts on poverty. The study analyzed poverty as a multi-dimensional concept, adopting an assets-based approach wherein poverty is defined as a deprivation in assets and entitlements essential to life, and a susceptibility to periodic physical and economic shocks and to seasonal crises.

In all case study projects, the poor and very poor benefited substantially from rural roads through access to state services in areas such as health, education, agricultural extension, and provision of information. Improved rural roads created the conditions for better access of people to services, and of services to the villages. Such improvements reduce the perception of isolation and remoteness among the poor and very poor.

The study showed that the context within which economic impacts take place is often determined by conditions such as climate, agricultural potential, spatial position and proximity to net-

works, and world market commodity prices, as well as by social structure and concentration of assets. Although these conditions cannot be affected by road development, their careful consideration during project identification and design would enable better assessment of the potential for poverty reduction through such projects, while possible complementary measures could be considered to increase positive impacts.

In the case study areas, economic benefits achieved were clearly different for different socio-economic groups. Most of the journeys made by the rural poor are for subsistence tasks. For them, access to local facilities and the primary transport network is critical during times of need, especially for health and social reasons. Improvements to the primary village network of paths, tracks, culverts, and access routes that reduce the burden of basic household and productive tasks, as well as the increased availability of intermediate modes of transport with larger carrying capacity to collect water, firewood, etc., are likely to have a greater initial impact on the well-being of the poor than improved availability of motorized transport services, which they do not or cannot afford to use. Therefore, improving transport within a village is as important to the poor and very poor as providing access to markets outside the village.



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