
PREFACE

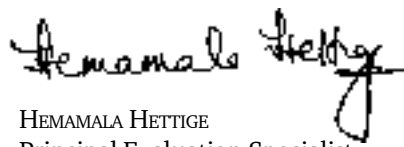
Roads are clearly a critical enabling condition for improving living conditions in rural areas. However, the distribution of socioeconomic benefits resulting from a rural road is a separate issue, and there are no guarantees or inherent mechanisms to ensure that these benefits will be distributed equitably between the poor and the nonpoor in communities. In the rural road projects studied, their ability to affect the distribution of assets and the skills capacity of the poor was limited and largely outside their scope. Nevertheless, recognizing how assets are distributed is important both for understanding how benefits will accrue and for planning complementary measures to enable those who lack assets also to benefit from the investment. Given the right complementary activities, projects can broaden livelihood opportunities. The poor need support to make use of the opportunities that rural roads may bring. This suggests that integrated projects are needed to tackle poverty effectively.

The case studies covered both sector road investments and integrated projects, where the road was one part of a larger program. In practice, the latter were either not truly integrated or were focused largely on benefiting better-off farmer groups. The poor require genuinely integrated programs of support right through the cycles of production, transportation, and sale. For the poor to travel for productive purposes, the provision of transport services must be linked to some livelihood and income diversification activity that builds on or supplements their existing subsistence activities. For such a scheme to be sustainable, it must eventually be self-financing. Implementation of integrated rural road projects is difficult, and the contextual situation differs from place to place. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) may suggest to borrowers to take on partners in program design and implementation such as other cooperating external assistance agencies, or local or international nongovernment organizations that have a proven track record in mobilizing and working closely with communities.

In addition to the suggestions above, the study provides a range of other recommendations regarding project design (on participatory design and planning, and on poverty assessment) as well as

implementation (working with partners and project performance monitoring). The importance of baseline surveys and data monitoring needs to be realized by all stakeholders if rigorous impact evaluations are to be carried out in the future to further improve project design. The study also acknowledges that governments have a critical role in facilitating a regulatory environment for competitive transport services, in participatory selection of roads to be improved, and in promoting understanding of the priority to be given to poverty reduction by its agencies.

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