

Introduction: Lessons from Past Projects for the Timor-Leste Transport Project

A. Potential of the Transport Sector to Promote Social and Gender Equity

The transport sector provides an example of a nontraditional channel to promote social, economic, and gender equity. Access to transportation on safe roads has a direct impact on the economic standing and quality of life in affected communities. Communities are affected through increased opportunities for buying and selling, availability of emergency health care, and stronger familial links. All these benefits are extended to both men and women, but tend to affect women differently.

More opportunities for buying and selling lead to greater independence for women in female-headed households and lessen the risks associated with vulnerable women's and children's being trafficked into bonded labor or sex work. Economic empowerment also often means life or death for the most vulnerable groups in society, which typically comprise women and children.

The availability of access to health care, especially in emergencies, can greatly reduce maternal mortality in developing countries. Limited access to transportation and exorbitant transportation costs are key barriers to those in need of medical assistance. Too often, those in greatest need wait

too long to attempt traveling to a hospital or clinic. Safe roads that are well-maintained increase traffic, and can cut transport costs for the very poor, eliminating a key barrier to accessing medical treatment.

Access to transportation allowing women to travel to visit extended family members is often critical. Women typically leave their families to join their husbands. Not only does better access to transportation reduce the risk of isolation, but it also increases women's visibility and serves as a deterrent to domestic violence because their spouses have to accept more accountability for their well-being.³

In summary, transport sector projects extend into most facets of community life. The role of the transport sector is not only to improve transportation and the related infrastructure, but also to ensure that the projects provide benefits related to trade, public health, education, and social, economic, and gender equity. Through knowledge sharing and the innovative incorporation of good practices, road projects throughout the region have the opportunity to succeed on many levels outside of the narrowly defined transport sector.

B. Good Practices in Addressing Social and Gender Concerns in Transport Projects

In a report prepared for the Gender Equality Unit of the Swedish International Development Agency, Masika and Baden⁴ argue that infrastructure planning and policy have largely focused on the technical aspects and goals relative to operational efficiency rather than economic, social, and gender goals or impacts.

In spite of the challenges, ADB (Box 1) and other development partners, including international nongovernment organizations (INGOs), have taken steps to identify and address gender and other social-related biases in project design. The feasibility study team considered the following international good practices and lessons learned from these projects in designing the Timor-Leste Road Sector Improvement Project (Section C).

³ Domestic violence and isolation go hand-in-hand. For nations with weak or limited social services, women's only advocate or protector may often be their immediate family members. Though sociocultural norms that condone domestic violence may exist, reducing women's isolation is a first step in reducing domestic violence.

⁴ See Development Assistance Committee Network on Gender Equality. 2004. *Why Gender Matters in Infrastructure*. Available: www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/docs/gendernet-infrastructure.doc.

Box 1: Social Inclusion and Gender in ADB Transport Projects

In the review of Asian Development Bank's (ADB's) Policy on Gender and Development, a number of good gender practices emerged in the design of loans approved from 1998 to 2004. These included various techniques to incorporate social and gender perspectives in the design and implementation arrangements of physical infrastructure projects, particularly transport projects. By 2004, 67% of transport projects included mitigation measures to address HIV/AIDS and/or trafficking risks. Some included positive measures to provide women with employment or other benefits (e.g., Rural Infrastructure Improvement Project in Cambodia, Section B.4). In fact, recent transport projects have set targets for local women's participation in road construction or rehabilitation works, based on an assessment of women's interest in doing such works.

In terms of mitigating social risks, large infrastructure projects now routinely include covenants requiring awareness programs on the risks of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections to be carried out in construction camps and the surrounding communities, and by transport operators. In the best cases, some recent transport projects have included specific components to support health awareness campaigns, provision of condoms, access to health services, and other activities. Many address risks of human trafficking, drawing on research and recommendations from an ADB-supported regional study on trafficking of women and girls. Other loan covenants provide for equal pay for equal work and facilities for workers and safe working conditions, and prohibiting use of child labor.

To date, most of ADB's physical infrastructure loans that address social risks in a meaningful way have been in the Greater Mekong Subregion and South Asia. These risks need to be addressed more consistently and effectively in East and Central Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific.



1. Gender Responsiveness

The transport sector has often been viewed as a “gender-neutral” realm. Such gender-neutral or “gender-blind” biases are often embedded in project design, and benefits are assumed to be distributed with no differential impact on women. However, this approach must be reassessed (Box 2). Women should be treated as “key beneficiaries” who are a strong force behind a project’s success and sustainability, rather than considering gender as an “afterthought” component in project design. Gender concerns should be viewed as pertinent to initial goals and objectives, and incorporated in the initial stages of project design if the ensuing interventions are to be credible and effective.

Gender concerns that can be addressed through project design vary greatly within the Asia and Pacific region due to the diverse sociocultural and religious norms. Indeed, influencing progress in gender equality involves changes in the culture and tradition of developing countries, which take time. Hence, any good practices identified should not be treated as broad prescriptions for all infrastructure or transport projects, but only as guideposts that must be reexamined and modified, as appropriate, to the national context.

Box 2: Removing Gender Biases in Development Projects

In addition to “gender-neutral” bias, subtle gender biases can also exist in the planning and management of infrastructure that, for example, may prioritize vehicle owners, who are typically men. This bias toward mobility rather than accessibility nonetheless creates a barrier for women and limits the benefits they may receive from a transport project. Women may also find themselves at a disadvantage due to their many reproductive tasks that require them to use public transportation at off-peak hours when it is often more unreliable or unsafe.

Gender bias can also be more overt in projects, which encourage female participation at low-level capacities that pay lip service to women’s participation but do nothing to advance gender equity. Though some countries tend to have more equitable gender representation in construction and related industries, limited sex-disaggregated data are available to show this phenomenon. Although some projects may positively affect female representation, gender biases preventing women from advancing to senior positions or earning more equitable salaries can prevent many of these projects from successfully addressing longer-term gender concerns.

Gender biases can also present structural barriers in the areas of access to property rights, rural finance, and microfinance. Authors Masika and Baden propose that special consideration be given to removing such structural barriers by registering property in women’s names, or increasing access to microcredit so that women are more motivated to push for equal access to community-based infrastructure projects. They also recommend improving the identification of areas of gender bias by reviewing explicit and implicit criteria applied to prioritizing and evaluating infrastructure development interventions.

The success of mainstreaming gender within transport sector projects is highly dependent upon a focused, well-planned gender strategy. Such strategies are often developed as part of project-specific gender action plans. Some ADB projects, including the Third Rural Infrastructure Development Project in Bangladesh (Box 3) and National Highway Corridor (Sector) Project in India (Box 4) are good examples of how the gender action plans and other socially inclusive and gender-responsive design features were key to enhancing gender equity and the social status of women—long-term goals that will outlast the life of any project.

Box 3: ADB's Third Rural Infrastructure Development Project in Bangladesh

In comparison with Timor-Leste, gender roles and sociocultural norms in Bangladesh differ dramatically. Project design features that emphasize women's participation and integration in the labor force face a multitude of obstacles and social constraints due to the segregation of the sexes and the seclusion of women (pardah), which are much more entrenched in rural areas where many projects are located. In Asian Development Bank's Third Rural Infrastructure Development Project in Bangladesh, the emphasis was on overarching gender equity goals and transcending sociocultural barriers that limit women's social and economic participation. Rather than recruiting women into the labor force or openly confronting social conventions, measures such as the provision of simple infrastructure—bathroom facilities, lower steps in public transport vehicles, or separate market stalls—increase women's visibility and inclusion in communal domains, such as buses, markets, or local government buildings. These small modifications to existing infrastructure balance women's need for privacy with their need for social inclusion. They also begin the process of more fully integrating women into social and economic domains that are traditionally segregated by sex and often dominated by men. This project notably “does not promote seclusion of women.” Instead, it “tries to promote women's participation in the public sphere by creating women's own space to give them confidence as pioneer women marketers.”^a It exemplifies a number of good practices that should be employed across other infrastructure or transport sector projects, where applicable.

^a Pulley, Tulin, Shireen Lateef, and Ferdousi Sultana Begum. 2001. *Making Infrastructure Work for Women in Bangladesh*. Manila: ADB, p. 6.

2. Women's Involvement

Transport projects designed to include women require serious consideration of issues that will determine the extent of women's participation. Physical security and privacy are priority issues for women worldwide. Though some projects have been largely successful, they have encountered problems that threaten to derail women's participation and involvement.⁵

⁵ Limited incidents of extortion and physical and sexual assault have been reported in CARE's Rural Road Maintenance Program in Bangladesh (Box 6). In ADB's Third Rural Infrastructure Development Project, the need for privacy was paramount.

Box 4: ADB's National Highway Corridor (Sector) Project in India

Asian Development Bank's National Highway Corridor (Sector) Project in India provides a good example of a transport sector project that integrates public health issues and promotes behavioral change to prevent HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections. This transport project, approved in 2003, aimed to rehabilitate and widen sections of the east-west highway corridor through Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh. Studies carried out during project preparation found that communities along the corridor were highly vulnerable to both HIV/AIDS and human trafficking risks because of the (i) poverty and low status of women and children in the area, (ii) presence of tribal communities with a history of sending women and children into prostitution, and (iii) expected increase in demand for commercial sex workers along the corridor from both highway construction workers and truckers. To address these risks, the loan project included a component on HIV/AIDS and human trafficking. The HIV/AIDS activities supported by the loan include (i) awareness raising for contractors and construction workers; (ii) a program on public awareness and behavior change aimed at both the general public and high-risk groups; (iii) strengthening of referral systems for HIV testing and sexually transmitted disease treatment; (iv) condom promotion; and (v) capacity building of local nongovernment organizations, pharmacists and health workers, motivators in service areas, and others.

The Third Rural Infrastructure Development Project in Bangladesh is an example of good practice of promoting access to institutional capacity building, which is linked to strengthening the transport sector. While an employment quota of 30% female Union Council members existed, measures were taken to ensure that their participation was real and not merely on paper. To facilitate women's fulfillment of their role in this capacity, separate facilities were provided to increase the comfort level of women as they discussed their roles. Separate facilities for discussion increased women's participation in decision making and created a forum for debate on issues of importance to their communities regarding rural road network development and income-generating opportunities. A similar approach was taken for the field consultations for the Timor-Leste Road Sector Improvement Project (Chapter II, Section D.)



Students walking several kilometers to their school

In addition to providing simple infrastructure, such as bathroom and bathing facilities to meet privacy concerns, gender-specific concerns need to be addressed directly with men in the project communities, including those participating in the projects (Box 5).

Box 5: Gender-Sensitivity to Men

Focus group discussions and sensitization seminars create dialogue among men on their opinions and views of women's participation. Open dialogue among men within their communities also allows for a better understanding of potential barriers to women's participation from a design perspective. The type of jobs women perform and their pay scale are some primary issues that may lead to resentment on the part of men, who may feel they deserve certain positions or more money than women for the same job do (as they are often heads of households). A thorough investigation of these views allows a project team to design and implement a project that includes measures or strategies to prevent or resolve such problems, to allow women greater access and equal benefits. Men's opinions on projects that include mechanisms for women's participation, a role for them in decision making, and accrual to them of economic benefits are critical to its success. In particular countries where women have very limited autonomy and where sex segregation—both socially and occupationally—is the norm, men must be engaged to overcome such social conventions that prevent women's participation.

3. Community Engagement

The design of studies and project elements that create open dialogue between the feasibility study team and local communities reinforces these net benefits to communities. Through community engagement, the level of ownership is likely to be much higher and the end results and benefits more sustainable. As in the Timor-Leste Road Sector Improvement Project (Chapter IV, B.3), it is critical to recognize the importance of community buy-in, and fully anticipate the importance of community support in the participation and maintenance of transport projects.

4. Employment Generation

A successful project in the transport sector is ADB's Rural Infrastructure Improvement Project in Cambodia. It was the first significant investment in infrastructure in 20 years and created employment for 3.17 million workers, of which about 25% or 792,500 were women.⁶ This project has also greatly improved access for communities and livelihoods. Another project which has created many income-generating opportunities, including employment, is CARE's Rural Road Maintenance Program in Bangladesh (Box 6).

5. Monitoring and Evaluation

Several issues in the area of monitoring and evaluation are critical to gender concerns and social inclusion. One of the key lessons from CARE's Rural Road Maintenance Program is the need for long-term monitoring of key beneficiaries which continued for 7 years. By tracking women who graduated from the program over this length of time, CARE noted dramatic changes in women's expenditures between the fifth and seventh years. These indicated key growth in economic standing and security as women began to move farther away from their previously destitute status, and became more economically powerful. Data such as this provide many lessons for future project design and levels of investment in the transport sector. Indeed, long-term goals relative to gender equity and social inclusion require long-term monitoring and evaluation to assess the success or failure of such projects properly, based on the appropriate indicators.

⁶ ADB. 2005. *Project Completion Report on the Rural Infrastructure Improvement Project in Cambodia*. Manila: ADB, pp. 9, 13.

Box 6: CARE's Rural Road Maintenance Program in Bangladesh

In the past 20 years, the CARE program has empowered the most destitute women, many of whom are divorced, separated, outcast or widowed. It has provided for both economic and social needs through job opportunities in rural road maintenance. About 42,000 women are employed annually in this 4-year program, which also offers training to selected women on human rights, gender equity, hygiene, health awareness, business management, numeracy, and different income-generating activities. CARE has successfully linked job creation for women and participation in road maintenance activities with long-term goals of gender equity and social inclusion.

One of the key successes of this program, moreover, comes from the economic empowerment that women have experienced, which is directly linked to their social status. By participating in road maintenance activities, women earn a daily wage, of which about 20% is saved to reinforce new income-generating activities at the end of their program cycle. CARE data reveal that only 0.1% of women reported that they did not start any other income-generating activities in their final year of the program. Following their graduation from this 4-year program, income-generating activities remain strong, with approximately 60% of women engaged in this work. Over the long term, women who have graduated from the program have also continued to increase their economic standing, as indicated by their increased expenditure on nonfood items, such as housing, education, and health care. Not only does this opportunity greatly affect vulnerable women, but also directly affects the next generation, which will benefit from their mother's work through more social acceptance and better access to health care and education, thus contributing to the long-term goal of poverty reduction in Bangladesh.

Rural communities rely heavily on their road network, which is typically in poor condition. As the Bangladesh project created jobs for women that communities can benefit from and see value in, these women in turn are viewed as more valuable to their communities, while also generating an income for themselves and their dependents. Members of communities that participate in this road maintenance component have experienced the benefits of these women's labor and about 90% of community people indicated that Roads Maintenance Association roads are more passable than before the project was undertaken. In turn, women involved in the roads maintenance component noted that they experienced greater social acceptance through invitations to social functions, events, and ceremonies because people now expect that they can afford to provide gifts for the hosts. Though sociocultural norms still overwhelmingly prevent women in general from participating in all social activities, these highly vulnerable women are now being accepted as part of their communities. This acceptance, in turn, serves to provide them with a social safety net—critical for women who do not have husbands, fathers, or brothers to protect and support them.

On the other hand, interventions that target women and vulnerable groups require process monitoring within the life of the project. This will ensure that timely modifications are made when projects encounter resistance, stagnancy, or even failure to meet certain projections or expectations. This also serves to advance the interests of the most vulnerable and least vocal members of communities.

Many countries do not currently disaggregate their national indicators by sex, so that determining the economic standing and social and health indicators for women (both on their own and in comparison with men) are very difficult, if not impossible. This lack of statistical visibility for women is a problem on two levels since it hampers the ability of projects to assess gender equity and concerns in the project design phase initially, and compels projects to invest in long-term monitoring and evaluation to assess these goals. For short-term transport projects that cannot invest in long-term tracking, it is critical that frameworks be appropriately designed to determine as nearly as possible the actual project benefits that accrue to women. This means that critical sex-disaggregated data must be gathered and baseline indicators established that allow gender-equity goals to be tracked, at least in the short term and preferably over the long term. This also sets a precedent for local institutions to reevaluate their monitoring and evaluation methods, giving women and gender issues visibility in a project and allowing for better analysis of project benefits and beneficiaries.

6. Budget Allocation

Including mitigation and livelihood activities in the design of physical infrastructure projects also raised the awareness of the executing agencies to the magnitude of the social risks involved in projects and the importance of addressing them in locally appropriate and realistic ways. However, their capacity and motivation to implement gender and social components are generally very weak. In addition, social risk mitigation components are often supported by parallel grants or are linked to existing government programs, and the obligations to mitigate risk extending the responsibility to mitigate risks to third parties, such as civil works contractors and transport operators. Therefore, providing adequate budget for social and gender-related activities is important to provide technical support to the executing agency and its project implementation team to ensure effective monitoring of the social and gender elements of the project during implementation.

C. Designing the Timor-Leste Road Sector Improvement Project

Actual project design and implementation clearly require dedicated objectives and proper monitoring to overcome obstacles and produce equitable outcomes and benefits in transport projects. This case study on the Timor-Leste Road Sector Improvement Project highlights how the feasibility study team adopted international good practices (Section B), in addition to other types of stakeholder consultations and data collection methods (Chapter II), to lay the groundwork for the project's social/gender analysis and distribution and poverty analysis (Chapter III). The results of the distribution and poverty analysis helped identify and incorporate the appropriate socially inclusive and gender-responsive features in the project (Chapter IV).