

Transport and the Village: Findings from African village-level travel and transport surveys and related studies

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The key finding of this report are:

1. Rural people in Africa devote a significant amount of time and effort to transport, much of which involves walking in and around the village, and is geared to domestic and subsistence needs. A range of factors determine the level and pattern of rural transport task including settlement structure, cultural variations, natural resource endowments, access to facilities and the availability and affordability of intermediate means of transport (IMTs).

2. Much of the burden of rural transport falls upon women, reflecting their dual responsibility for social reproduction and economic production. Water and firewood collection constitute the major part of this transport burden. Factors which affect the scale of this transport task include the number of adult females in the household, and the distance to sources of water and firewood. IMTs are only used to reduce the domestic transport burden for women in situations where access to firewood is problematic. This burden of the transport task acts as a constraint to participation by women in reproductive and productive activities.

3. IMTs play two major roles in alleviating transport constraints. Load-carrying IMTs are used for the transport of farm inputs, particularly fertilizer, and harvested crops, and contribute to the first transport stage in the marketing chain. IMTs that facilitate personal travel, with small accompanying loads, are used for marketing the limited quantities of crops, for the movement of small amounts of farm inputs, and for travel for social purposes. They are used predominately by men. There are major variations in the level of ownership of IMTs in the five different study areas. Factors which affect the level of ownership include the availability IMTs, familiarity with IMTs, terrain conditions, cultural attitudes, access to credit for purchases of IMTs, and the financial return that results from ownership.

4. Typical rural people make very limited use of for-hire services. They inhabit a largely walking world and long distance travel is rare. Rural people benefit more from the operation of motor vehicles to bring services to their communities, and, in particular, to deliver farm inputs and to evacuate marketed crops. Thus, the major function of access roads is to facilitate this travel to the village by trucks at critical times in the agricultural calendar.

5. Transport becomes a constraint to crop production when the time and effort needed for agricultural transport tasks exceeds the household labor resource available at periods of peak activity, and particularly during harvesting. IMTs appear to be the most effective response to this transport constraint. The hire of IMTs by non-owners at these times extends their impact. Transport becomes a constraint to crop marketing when the time and effort involved exceeds the household labor resource available for this task. For bulky crops, which are marketed as a concentrated effort, the ability to transport the crop to a motor vehicle fairly close to the point of production is critical. IMT can be used for marketing of crops which are low bulk and high value, or which are sold continuously in small quantities. They are also used to deliver larger quantities of crops to bulking points for transference to motor vehicle.

6. The utilization of social facilities, such as health centers and markets, relates to the level of physical access, i.e., distance and the availability of means of transport. In extreme circumstances access is so bad that the utilization of the facilities ceases altogether. More generally, poor access resulted in limited utilization of, and benefit from, the social services.