



From Talking to Walking

Enhancing accountability in rural road interventions

Recently there has been increased recognition of the rights of communities, including vulnerable groups, to participate in all processes of transport and infrastructure development, from design, through implementation, to the monitoring of performance and impact. Community participation, a key principle of a rights-based approach to development, is seen as critical in ensuring that programmes are sustainable, accountable and transparent. As more donors move towards rights-based approaches the integration of cross-cutting issues such as gender, youth and health (including HIV/AIDS) has become paramount. These days most project frameworks will adopt an all-inclusive approach and use the correct jargon, however the challenge of actually implementing this approach on the ground remains. How do we move from talking to walking? This article draws upon the experiences of the Roads 2000 programme in Nyanza Province, Kenya, as it addresses these challenges and applies practical solutions.

The Roads 2000 strategy in Nyanza, funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), and implemented by IT Transport (ITT) UK in partnership with the Kenyan Ministry of Roads and Public Works and other local partners, has established district level working groups and community road committees (CRCs) in eleven districts. The working groups aim to support district engineers to incorporate cross-cutting issues into programme activities. Each group includes a number of key district personnel, such as agricultural and public health officers, alongside the district engineer. The use of existing district staff and structures is a sustainable means of supporting the Engineer to ensure the integration of cross-cutting issues.

Following a rights-based approach Roads 2000 in Nyanza helps to establish CRCs in communities alongside the roads to be improved. For longevity existing social development committee structures have provided the basis for the formation of the CRCs. Their main objective is to encourage community participation and local ownership, both of which have been neglected in the past to the detriment of sustainable road improvements.

CRCs are also a means of promoting accountability and transparency in the delivery of public infrastructure and the sustainability of programme benefits. The roles and responsibilities of the committees are intended to encourage more customer-focused road management by:

- Encouraging community input into the design of the road e.g. the location of drainage structures and safe crossing points, as well as minor adjustments to the alignment to protect important trees and other local features.
- Addressing poverty reduction objectives by identifying marginalised and vulnerable persons to work as labourers, clerks and support staff.
- Monitoring and providing feedback on work progress, particularly in terms of cross-cutting issues, workers rights and local impacts.

Overall the transport sector (including some more conservative donors) has displayed a limited capacity to value and integrate rights-based principles. One stumbling block is engineers at local and central level, who often consider it a burden to their already heavy workload and not necessarily relevant to the job of building roads. There is therefore a need to build the capacity of engineers and contractors through the integration of cross-cutting issues in both university engineering curricular and in (post-university) training courses. The key is to transfer knowledge that is relevant, applicable and useable in the field, remembering that it is counter-productive to 'know everything about everything'.

Within Nyanza Roads 2000 this issue is being addressed through discussion with the Kisii Training Centre (KTC), which specialises in training contractors and engineers in labour-based approaches. Currently, cross-cutting issues are addressed as separate topics, so one idea has been to introduce cross-cutting issues through class-based work combined with field visits, enabling theoretical knowledge to be



Women and men work side by side in road construction, Nyanza, Kenya.

applied directly to their work with CRCs. Exercises will focus on the duties and rights of communities and contractors in relation to cross-cutting and other issues, with discussion focused on practical solutions.

Another challenge is the way in which contracts are designed and progress is reported and evaluated. Transport sector performance is generally measured according to the number of kilometres built and maintained, often the key indicator in donor programmes. Correspondingly, the performance targets in the contracts of district engineers tend to relate only to the engineers improvement and maintenance plan. If we are serious about poverty reduction and rights-based approaches as an integral component of road sector programmes, then we must measure performance in relation to these goals. This could be through integration into the job descriptions and performance contracts of engineers and contractors and within the monitoring and evaluation framework.

Roads 2000 in Nyanza has attempted to move in this direction with district engineers expected to report on gender disaggregated employment figures. However, this needs to extend to evaluation of impact, for example what impact does employment creation have on the local community? How effectively are women and youth engaging in programme activities? What is the impact of the HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns (integral to Nyanza Roads 2000's contract) in terms of mitigating the spread of the disease?

In an increasingly decentralised environment, Ministries need to work more closely together at the district level to enable a mix of expertise that will support the implementation of integrated programmes. For example, it should be made a part of the performance contract for district staff to ensure that health issues are adequately addressed in roads and other sector programmes. Similarly, roads and transport ministries should be assessed on how effectively they work with other ministries to improve accessibility to services. Focusing on numbers of kilometres improved and maintained is simply not enough and will not help the transport sector to move from theory to practice, from talking to walking.

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