

# Foreign Voices



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## Transport that addresses all people's needs

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*It is widely recognised that transport policies in many developing countries do not consider the travel needs of low income people. Especially in rural areas, mobility and access to markets, health centres, schools and other services will remain difficult for the majority of the people. The available options are too costly and unsafe, and villages are too far from these services. As a result, communities remain in isolation and young people are in most cases compelled to migrate to urban and peri-urban areas. Patrick Kayemba from the First African Bicycle Information Organization (FABIO) follows up on the exchange of the Bonn Symposium 2011 on "Mobility – Development – Culture. Towards Sustainable Transport Strategies".*

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**„It is vital to make transport an integral part of rural and urban development planning.“**



Most people in developing countries live in rural areas where no efficient transport modes are available. In cities, on the other hand, the majority lives on the periphery which is also not well connected to the inner city. Large amounts of money are invested in highways, mainly through loans from the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the African Development Bank, the European Union and other foreign donors with a legitimate objective of connecting regions and districts to the main cities. But this focus on building highways and streets does not address the real transport needs of low income people and leaves the governments of developing countries with the task of meeting the high cost of road maintenance. To make matters worse, most developing countries are spending large amounts of foreign exchange on importing motor vehicles.

In the early 1990s, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) encouraged many developing countries to privatise all public enterprises, including public transport services, with the aim of improving efficiency and promoting development. Privatisation was embraced by many of these countries without any hesitation and with no comprehensive review of this privatisation strategy. In Uganda, for example, the privatisation of Uganda Transport Company and People's Transport Companies led to the emergence of an entirely unorganised public transport system of 14-seater matatus (privately owned minibuses) and motor cycles, which has not really worked for the people. These transport vehicles are owned by individuals who determine their own rates according to demand: the more the people on the road, the higher the charge.

### **Where is the problem?**

The rural transport needs of the poor and marginalised communities are quite different from what is being assessed by the planners. Non-availability of services to fulfil their subsistence needs, such as water and energy, forces rural people to travel long distances, which takes up a great deal of time. There is no proper infrastructure, and goods are often carried on the head, with limited capacity. These jobs are usually done by women and children. They face a high risk of spinal cord injuries and injuries caused by slipping and falling on bad footpaths. One approach to this problem could be a non-transport solution, such as locating the services close to the community, or a transport solution to reduce drudgery and save time. Markets being inaccessible and too far away directly affect poor people's economic and livelihood activities and opportunities, keeping them in poverty. Rural development plans will not succeed if these transport problems are not addressed. It is vital to make transport an integral part of rural development plans. There are many poverty eradication projects where huge amounts of money – mostly loans which have to be paid back – have been wasted. In most cases, transport issues are not addressed adequately and, consequently, many such projects have not succeeded and will not succeed. Even the frequency of public transport on the

nearest motorable roads, accessible only by walking at least two to five kilometres, is extremely low. This is due to the low volume of passengers in rural areas, which reduces the profitability of public transport. Again, this poor service mainly affects the low income person.

### **Non-motorised transport as an alternative**

Non-motorised transport (NMT) is defined as a device that will ease transport between walking and motorised transport. It can either be an improved backpack, a bicycle, a hand cart or an appropriately adapted motorised means. The NMT is very useful in rural areas where travel is usually done with goods and passengers. NMT can also help to relieve children from the drudgery of transport.

A bicycle as one of the NMTs is a low cost affordable vehicle and presents itself as the number one solution to transport challenges. But in most countries, bicycles are still very expensive and unaffordable due to the high government taxes levied. Furthermore, this mode of transport has remained unsafe, resulting in huge numbers of lives lost in road accidents. Road designs have remained motor-oriented and unfortunately the international agencies that provide funding for these roads have remained silent as the road is constructed with no space for the non-motorised users.

There is a need to consider a comprehensive approach even at this level. International agencies funding road construction projects need to set conditions which encourage the construction of roads that are suitable for everyone, including the disabled, elderly, children, cyclists, pedestrians, donkeys and hand carts.

### **Bicycle-based modes**

The role of the bicycle in sub-Saharan Africa is completely different from Europe and other developed countries. Bicycles in Africa are not only used to go to work but also as a source of livelihood and access to basic social economic services. Two thirds of the livelihoods of African people rely on the bicycle for survival and to carry heavy loads, the sick and passengers for short distances. Increasing bicycle ownership in local communities is a direct intervention to solve the various practical needs of low income people. Heavily loaded, bicycles are usually pushed as it is difficult to pedal with a load. Some people use innovative devices such as fixing four sticks to enlarge the rear luggage carrier. The commonly available bicycle in Africa, the Indian or Chinese type known as Black Mamba, can carry heavy loads and the cost of maintenance is minimal. Nevertheless, there are disadvantages in this model as it does not have any gearing system to make pedalling easier with goods. Mountain bikes or other advanced models are expensive and involve high maintenance costs. In Uganda, the average price of

a standard (Black Mamba) bicycle is around US\$ 100 and the cost of a cheap second-hand mountain bike is almost US\$ 150, which makes it unaffordable for most low income people.

There is a need for international agencies to provide funding for innovative projects that promote a simple gearing system for the most commonly used standard bicycles with the aim of increasing the load-carrying capacity of the bicycle.

### **Conclusion**

More than ever, governments at the various levels, central and local, need to consider the importance of integrated development planning, which must take account of people's different transport needs. This is essential if the developing countries are to achieve sustainable development for all. Inclusive transport is an essential prerequisite for the sustainable transformation of these societies. Foreign investment alone is not enough, since most people will not benefit from any "trickle-down". Informal settings and individual efforts play an important role as well.

Governments and development partners should invest in policies and programmes that prioritise transport as a means of promoting sustainable development, the aim being to attain the Millennium Development Goals and achieve prosperity for everyone.

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### **Imprint**

The **Development and Peace Foundation** is a cross-party, non-profit-making organisation which was founded in 1986 on the initiative of Willy Brandt. More information is available under: [www.sef-bonn.org](http://www.sef-bonn.org)

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