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Case Study on Intermediate Means of Transport Bicycles and Rural Women in Uganda

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Foreword

One of the objectives of the Rural Travel and Transport Project (RTTP) is to recommend approaches for improving rural transport, including the adoption of intermediate transport technologies to facilitate goods movement and increase personal mobility. For this purpose, comprehensive village-level travel and transport surveys (VLTTS) and associated case studies have been carried out. The case studies focus on the role of intermediate means of transport (IMT) in improving mobility and the role of transport in women's daily lives. The present divisional working paper is the second in a series reporting on the VLTTS. The first working paper focussed on travel to meet domestic needs (for water, firewood, and food processing needs), and on the impact on women of the provision of such facilities as water supply, woodlots, fuel efficient stoves and grinding mills.

The present case study documents the use of bicycles in eastern Uganda where they are a means of generating income for rural traders and for urban poor who work as bicycle taxi-riders. It also assesses women's priorities regarding interventions to improve mobility and access, and the potential for greater use of bicycles by rural women and for women's activities.

The bicycle is the most common IMT in SSA, and it is used to improve the efficiency of productive tasks, and to serve as a link between farms and villages, nearby road networks, and market towns. The study indicates that the financial return on these activities is so high that the cost of the bicycle can be recovered in less than twelve months. It is further asserted that the main reason for the relatively small number of bicycle traders is the lack of credit.

The study highlights the general situation in SSA where IMT are predominantly owned and used by men and, where, for mainly cultural and economical reasons, women rarely get to use IMT for their transport needs.

The RTTP is a component of the Sub-Saharan Africa Transport Policy Program (SSATP). The general objective of the SSATP is to help governments improve transport policies so as to enhance the efficiency of transport services, and to ensure that they are sustainable. The RTTP has supported the development of country strategies (Madagascar, Ghana, Ethiopia, Uganda, Tanzania), and has produced a comparative review of rural transport policies¹ as well as thematic and policy papers dealing with rural road strategies² and intermediate means of transport.³ The country specific work as well as the above-mentioned surveys will provide the basis to prepare guidance papers on key aspects of rural transport strategies. This will support the drive to address the transport needs of rural households and, more generally, to develop rural infrastructure services in Africa.

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¹ Gaviria, Juan. 1991. *Rural Transport and Agricultural Performance in SSA: 6 Country Case Studies*. Washington, D.C.: The World Bank (AFTIN).

² Riverson, John et al. 1991. *Rural Roads in Sub-Saharan Africa: Lessons from Bank Experience*. Washington, D.C.: The World Bank (AFTIN).

³ Riverson, John and Steve Carapetis. 1991. *Intermediate Means of Transport in Sub-Saharan Africa: Its Potential for Improving Rural Travel and Transport*. Washington, D.C.: The World Bank (AFTIN).

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Acronyms

ADP	Agricultural Development Project
AFTES	Africa Technical Department, Environmentally Sustainable Development Division
BCU	Bugisu Cyclist Union
DYA	Doko Youth Association
EC	European Community
ILO	International Labor Organization
IMT	Intermediate Means of Transport
MDBT	Mukwano Disco Bicycle Transporters
MOLG	Ministry of Local Government
MUT	Mbale United Transporters
RC	Resistance Committee
RTTP	Rural Travel and Transport Project
SDC	Swiss Development Cooperation
SIDA	Swedish International Development Authority
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
SSATP	Sub-Saharan Africa Transport Policy Program
SWRARP	South West Region Agricultural Rehabilitation Project
TRR	Tororo Transport Cycle Cooperative Society
USh	Ugandan shilling
UWFCT	Uganda Women's Finance and Credit Trust, Ltd.
VLTS	Village-level Travel and Transport Surveys
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association

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Annex 1

* *The page numbering refers to the printing version*

Executive Summary

This working paper suggests that the ownership and use of bicycles in Eastern Uganda can be seen as meeting two household needs. The bicycle meets the personal transport requirements of male household members, and it is also a means of generating income. This can be directly through the sale of transport services i.e. as taxis (boda-boda riders), or indirectly, by enabling a member of the household to act as a middleman or trader.

The most frequent use of bicycles in a survey area of Mbale district was for trips to markets and to local trading centers to purchase and sell food and household items. Bicycles were also employed to take sick family members to the clinic. The ownership and use of a bicycle for personal transport is influenced by a number of factors, of which household economic status, cultural background and location with regard to terrain and infrastructure are the most important.

The cost of a bicycle is high and increasing at a rate faster than the prices received for agricultural commodities. The general lack of credit moreover, means that the cost of a bicycle has to be met in full when purchased. This stretches the household's ability to save, and usually, bicycles can only be bought when the harvested crops are sold. It is, therefore, not surprising that bicycle ownership is highest among the wealthier households of Mbale and Tororo.

Culturally, bicycle ownership and use is the prerogative of the male members of the household. Bicycle ownership confers social prestige, and their use is monopolized by men to reduce the time and cost of making journeys outside the village. In Mbale district, women riding bicycles are perceived to "behave like men," while in Tororo district, the main obstacle women encounter is one of access to bicycles. Nevertheless, there is the suggestion that a minority of women have indirectly benefited from bicycle ownership. Some of the transport burden of these women has been transferred to male household members through, for instance, sons and husbands fetching water from distant dry season sources.

The locational characteristics of the area of residence are also an important influence on bicycle ownership. As can be expected, bicycle ownership is highest in the flatter lowlands of Tororo and tends to decline as altitude and gradients increase, so that it is absent in the escarpment zone of Mbale. At the same time, bicycle use is affected by the road surface; well-maintained roads are easier and safer to negotiate than badly-maintained ones.

The income-generating potential of bicycles has been developed in two ways. In the urban areas, the direct sale of passenger transport services, where the passenger sits on the back carrier, has become an important avenue for young men to earn a living as boda-boda riders. In the rural areas, the ability of the bicycle to carry 100 or more kilograms of beer and matoke has enabled traders to transport these commodities to a wider market. In the case of beer brewing, the trade is from the millet-growing lowlands to the uplands. With matoke, the trade is reversed, going from the wetter uplands down to the matoke-deficit lowlands and to Mbale town itself. In either case, the use of bicycles can be seen both to complement and supplement existing motorized transport modes. The boda-boda acts as a localized individual transport service carrying passengers from the extensive outer suburbs of the towns to the central facilities and work places. Similarly, boda-bodas can be seen transporting away newly-arrived travellers from the bus station to their destinations in town. In the rural areas the small-

scale nature of the millet beer and matoke trade lend themselves to bicycle transport. In both situations, the bicycle has proved itself to be a flexible and durable transport mode in difficult terrain and road conditions.

In financial terms, the income-generating potential of the bicycle is high. It is calculated that in each of the three activities, the bicycle owner can recover the costs of the investment in less than twelve months.

Finally, this working paper addresses the question as to whether Intermediate Means of Transport (IMT) can reduce the transport burden of women. A number of IMT time- and effort-saving devices are currently in use in the rural areas of eastern Uganda. The problem is that they are rarely used for women's transport activities and women have limited access to them due to cultural, educational and economic constraints.

The women seem eager to adopt IMT. To this end, the introduction of a sturdy "ladies' bicycle" is advocated as one way of overcoming the cultural resistance to women using bicycles. Such an initiative would need to be complemented by the provision of credit and strengthening of the management capacity of women's groups. There is also the potential to reduce women's transport burden through non-transport interventions, i.e. by locating economic and social facilities such as wells, woodlots, and clinics nearer the home.

This working paper is an input into the preparation of guidance papers on rural transport strategies. The key issues which emerged from the present study point to the following:

- The importance of credit in promotion of IMT. The main obstacle to the increased use of bicycles in business activities in the study area was the difficulty in raising the initial investment to purchase the bicycle;
- When aiming to alleviate the transport burden of rural women, a number of options have to be considered including improvement in mobility (promotion of IMT), provision of facilities closer to the household, and low cost transport infrastructure--tracks and footpaths;
- Given the range of options for improving local level transport, during the planning stage the project area has to be surveyed together with local interest groups to identify their priorities and the most appropriate interventions.