THE WESTERN UGANDA ROAD MAINTENANCE PROJECT - A CASE STUDY IN COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

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Objectives of the case study

In much of Africa steps are being taken to develop sustainable approaches to the maintenance of national road networks. In association with IT Transport's Guidelines for Community Participation in Road Maintenance, four case study projects were initiated in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. The case study of the Western Uganda Road Maintenance Project, started in May 1996, focuses on the information interfaces between the key stakeholders.

The project is jointly funded by the Government of Uganda and the United Kingdom Department for International Development. Facets of the project include Institutional strengthening, improved community participation, contractor development and technical assistance for rehabilitation.

WESTERN UGANDA ROAD MAINTENANCE CAPACITY BUILDING PROJECT

1. INTRODUCTION

The Western Uganda Road Maintenance Capacity Building Project (WURMCBP), under the Ministry of Works, Housing and Communications (MoWHC), began in May 1996 and is expected to run for over 4½ years. The project has a goal of promoting economic development and reducing poverty in Western Uganda. To achieve this the project's purpose is to establish an improved and responsive system for the sustainable maintenance of 1,157 km of rehabilitated gravel roads. This involves the rehabilitation of 974km of selected gravel roads in six districts of Western Uganda, these being Bundibugyo, Hoima, Kabarole, Kibale, Masindi and Mubende.

The project has a number of facets that include institutional strengthening, contractor development and technical assistance for rehabilitation.

2. COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION COMPONENT

The community participation component of the WURMCBP is a new and innovative approach to community participation at this level of the road sector. The project is seen as a pilot for new community participation methods working on an informed trial and error basis, with milestones for review at each phase. The initial approach was developed during the inception phase when a local consultant was employed to assess community views on road improvements, maintenance requirements, design features and opportunities for community labour and materials contributions. After this study a project launch workshop was held at Hoima in 1996. The purpose being to explain the project to primary stakeholders and discuss

mechanisms for community participation. From this a Logical Framework for the component was developed.

2.1. Component framework

The framework details the purpose of the community participation component as being "To establish an improved and responsive system for the sustainable maintenance of 1,157km of rehabilitated gravel road in Western Uganda involving local communities". The inception report goes further to emphasise that the aim of the component is "To facilitate a high level of community input" into:

- the design of the gravel main roads being rehabilitated;
- local employment on the roads; and,
- monitoring of the road works.

This will ensure that benefits accruing to the poorer people in the project area are maximised. The outputs to achieve this are "974km of network rehabilitated and incorporating community-determined design features" and "effective mechanisms put in place to facilitate community participation in management of road improvement impacts in the project area". Activities to achieve these outputs are:

i) Roadside communities involved in road improvement designs.
ii) Local community members including women employed in road improvement works.
iii) Local communities monitoring rehabilitation and maintenance works.
iv) Local community members, including women and youth employed in routine manual maintenance of gravel roads.
v) Road safety training carried out.

Within these activities the modes of participation have been mainly through consultation, information exchange and some discussion. Specifically enabling improved communication between the District Engineer (DE) and the community that lives along the road. It was felt that this should be done through a Road Committee (RC) who would represent the community. Thus, the basic structure for information exchange is shown in Figure 1. The RC is comprised of LCIII, LCII and LCI chairmen, sub-county chairman, community development officer, women's representatives, youth representatives, transportors' representatives and other relevant officials. These groups were chosen through a stakeholders' analysis and are considered primary stakeholders representing the community.

To co-ordinate this process a Community Roads Officer (CRO) under the MST was recruited soon after project implementation started. One of the activities of the CRO is to facilitate the process of communities' participation in the road rehabilitation.

In essence the RCs are the representatives of the community acting as a decision making body and conduit for the flow of information to and from the District Engineer. This information includes technical road issues, road safety and the advertisement of employment to be generated by the road.

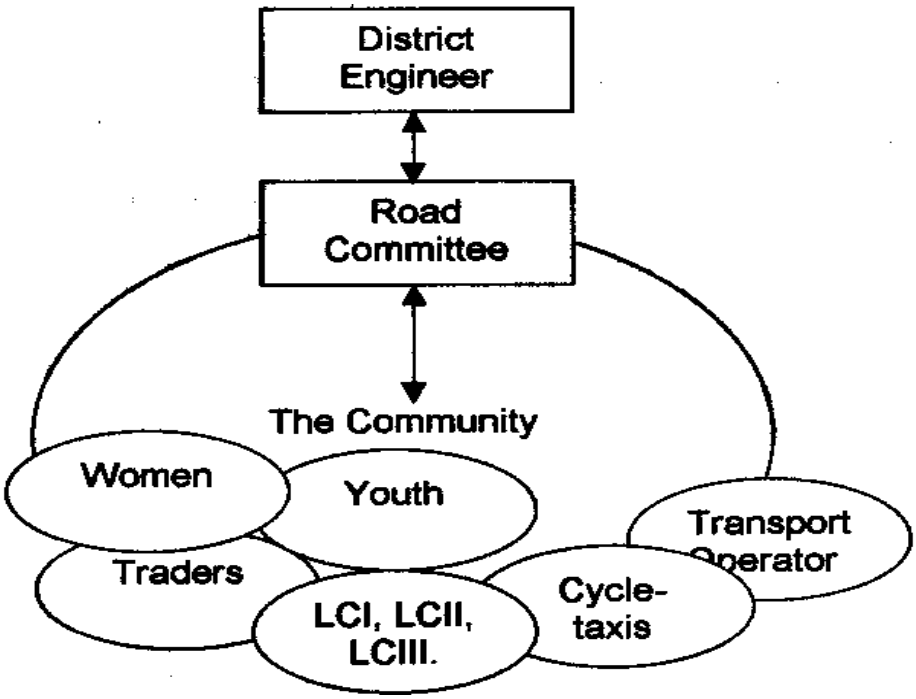

Figure 1: Organogram for District Engineer - Community interface

2.2. Community participation component achievements

The majority of this information came from five days of participatory qualitative data collection in Kaborole District. One of the largest of the six districts under the project and also one of the first to have RCs. Within the District the team concentrated on Burahya County, Hakibare and Bukuku Sub-Counties. The selection of the study participants was based on their perceived roles and functions in the project activities, and benefits accruing to them from roads previously rehabilitated and maintained.

2.3. The involvement of roadside communities in road improvement designs

The RCs role in the initial design and planning process is mainly consultative. The selection criteria for the project roads were based on the amount of traffic volume and socio-economic development potential. The selections were costed and forwarded to the MoWHC's Central Office for approval or rejection. In other words, initially project activities did not focus on responding to needs as expressed by the local community but to traditional technical appraisal requirements. This may be reasonable as with any large road the benefits are distributed much further than the communities on the roadside. The community members spoken to felt they had benefited from the improved roads, but the perception is that the roads are government responsibility serving the interests of the rich. This may be dangerous if the project is trying to sustain community participation in the project. As the following verbatim quotations indicate:

"The main reason for the rehabilitation of the road [Fort Portal -Kijura road] is because of Tea estates in the area, not because it was our wish." Boda Boda Cycle Operators Focus Group.

"During the period of my contract I would say I own the road, because I am currently working on it; but after the expiry of my contract I cannot claim so." Petty contractors Fort-Portal-Kijura road.

"The roads belong to the Government" Woman dairy farmer.

Thus, the RC's role in the initial design and planning stages is effectively consultative - they act as a body to be informed of project activities and educated on technical road issues.

For some of the district engineering staff this approach makes sense as they can pass on their technical knowledge and it is more efficient to not involve the communities in the road design process. For the RC members this process of education has enabled them to speak with some realism about the rehabilitation and maintenance of roads and equipped them to undertake a more informed dialogue with engineers. This has been useful when negotiating over the siting of borrow pits, as well as in the continued rehabilitation of the roads, as a request from a RC to extend the Fort Portal-Kijura link was approved by the MST. Unfortunately, the District Engineers have not been receptive to this empowerment. The majority of the discussion by RCs has been with the MST and through the usual local council channel of the LCV works committee. This poorly developed communication channel with the District Engineer's Office may be a symptom of the formulation process of the RCs.

The RCs were largely formulated and empowered by the CRO, who is part of the MST team. .This has meant that RCs see the MST as their main point of contact -this was highlighted in one group session where the road rehabilitation was referred to as the "white man's project". Thus, the link between the MST and the RC is strong and the links between the RC and the District Engineer are weak. In a group RRA exercise with some RC members they identified the Local Council (LC V) as the body to go to if they have problems with the roads. The RC members said that the DE was not worth going to as he (the DE) would never listen.

2.4. Local community members including women employed in road improvement works

The project is instituting a maintenance system that includes routine and periodic works. Routine works are split between: labour based -grass cutting and desilting culverts; and, plant based -re-grading. The scope for employing local people in the road works has been limited to routine labour based maintenance, as the majority of rehabilitation and periodic maintenance works have been plant based. There is also local employment year round from the tea estates that effects the willingness of people to work on the roads. The MST has encouraged the DE and RCs to advertise locally for new labourers to work on the road. However, with the retrenchment of many district engineering employees it is likely that the majority of contractors and labourers will be from this well known base.

2.5. Is the road committee effective?

The RCs are seen as the representatives of the community and the starting block of community participation. The induction seminars organised by the MoWHC/MST and forestalled potential conflicts that normally take place between roads projects and the roadside residents, especially over road reserves and demands for compensation over lost land due to borrow-pits and gravel extraction. This process enabled the realisation of

technical and social interfaces in roadwork design, which in effect, made the project more acceptable and orientated toward the community.

The RC have also acted as an advocacy forum for the communities, for instance in asking the project to extend a road to the next trading centre (Fort-Portal-Kijura road link) or to install additional drainage pipes, in order to make the Kyaitamba -Kabende road-link passable. Although, it is felt that if the community is well represented by the RC, the RC's activities are not well known in the community since there seems to be little feedback on their activities.

The project design truly acknowledged the need for a gender balanced approach to labour employment. The implementation phase further acknowledged the need of positive discrimination criteria, for instance, assigning light tasks to women specifically; working on scour-checks and foot path improvement. However, the realisation of women's fuller and sustained participation has remained elusive due to the nature of physical work involved and society's perceptions of women's involvement in menial jobs.

3. CONCLUSION

With participation, especially at the national level, the government is committed to strengthening institutional capacity for road infrastructure planning and implementation. The government has decided to set up an autonomous Road Agency/Authority by July 2000. In the immediate period the government established a Road Agency Formation Unit in April 1998, part of its task is divestiture of services in the roads sector. In this respect, institutional transformation and development is likely to ensure entrenchment of community participation in the new government approach, especially when this experimentation project is discussed and/or replicated in other districts.

Community participation has increasingly become a cornerstone in social development projects, although the transport sector has lagged behind. The WURMCBP’s endeavour to integrate and implement community participation has been an innovative element, giving a technical project a ‘human face’ allowing informed dialogue with community representatives through the RC’s.

KEY REFERENCES

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