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TITLE: Community Involvement and Privatisation in the Implementation of Rural Access Programmes

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Abstract

In the development of strategies for the implementation of rural access programmes, emphasis is placed on the involvement and participation of communities to achieve a sense of ownership and to bring direct benefits of increased employment and incomes. At the same time private sector participation is to be encouraged to reduce the involvement of government in the implementation of the programmes.

The social demands for improved livelihoods cannot be satisfactorily achieved or sustained by simply subsidising community work programmes which fail to provide value for money or meet technical parameters. Conversely, a wholly open market approach to privatisation may lead to exploitation of vulnerable groups with limited economic power.

A system which provides employment to community groups under the management of a government agency, such as food for work schemes, requires high levels of government involvement similar to those employed in force account work methods adopted in the past. The system lacks sustainability and efficiency.

Open market options using established contractors in competitive bidding generally fail to provide a fair distribution of economic benefits to the community providing the labour with a consequent lack of involvement and ownership, and a loss of sustainability.

To achieve the potential advantages of both community participation and privatisation has proven to be difficult to achieve on a number of rural access programmes. It requires an approach that either develops the commercial capacity of communities or encourages the contracting industry to operate in partnership with the communities.

The paper examines a number of options that have been followed by the authors in Botswana, Nepal, Vietnam and Nigeria to meet both the economic and immediate social objectives of these rural access development programmes. The UK DFID have funded or contributed to three of these programmes and have emphasized community involvement.

The programmes have varying approaches, sources of funding, socio-political settings and cultural norms. Despite these differences a number of key success factors have been identified.

A suggested model for improving private sector implementation and community participation is discussed. The method relies on ways of creating genuine private sector and community partnership with Governments taking a pro-active role in creating an enabling environment that goes beyond mere policy formulation. A number of key areas are identified for further research and data gathering.

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Introduction

In recent years international donors have placed increasing emphasis on programmes designed to improve the livelihoods of the rural poor by means of improvements to the services provided to these communities. These services include health, education, water and agricultural extension, which critically, all depend on the provision of reliable infrastructure systems for power, fuel, telecommunications and transport.

In seeking improvements to the transport infrastructure, donors have addressed both the focus and delivery of capital investments and the sustainability of these investments through continuity of maintenance efforts. This has led to an intensification of government reform programmes aimed at achieving greater involvement of the private sector in implementation, and improvements to the public sector in setting policy and in management, planning and supervision.

Further developments brought about a demand for greater community participation in both decision making and in the physical implementation of projects to give more weight to the needs of the communities and greater sense of ownership of the transport network. Rural Access Programmes are increasingly being required to deliver both indirect benefits to rural communities through improved access, and direct benefits to the community through their financial participation in the improvement works.

Thus, in the development of strategies for the implementation of rural access programmes, emphasis is placed on the involvement and participation of communities to achieve a sense of ownership and to bring direct economic benefits, whilst at the same time private sector involvement and participation is to be encouraged to improve efficiency and to reduce the direct involvement of government in the implementation of works. The dichotomy is two-fold; first to maintain the technical standard of the work, and second to increase private sector involvement (and small government) whilst also providing involvement and employment directly to the rural community.

The social demands for improved livelihoods cannot satisfactorily be achieved or sustained by simply subsidising community work programmes which fail to provide value for money or meet technical parameters. Conversely, a wholly open market approach to privatisation may lead to exploitation of vulnerable groups with limited economic power.

A system which provides employment to community groups under the management of a government agency, such as food for work schemes, requires high levels of government involvement similar to those employed in force account work methods adopted in the past. Inevitably, when the support ends the programme collapses and the system lacks sustainability and efficiency.

In much of the developing world, the traditional implementation by direct works have been abandoned in favour of full utilisation of the private sector. Many countries have legislation designed to improve transparency in tendering which militates against awarding contracts within a protected environment to inexperienced contracting organisations.

Open market options using established contractors in competitive bidding are generally efficient and effective in delivering projects, but they often fail to provide a fair distribution of economic benefits to the community providing the labour, with a consequent lack of involvement and ownership, and a loss of sustainability.

To achieve the potential advantages of both community participation and privatisation has proved to be difficult to achieve on a number of rural access programmes. It requires an approach that either develops the commercial capacity of communities or encourages the contracting industry to operate in partnership with the communities.

This paper examines a number of options that have been followed by the authors in Nigeria, Botswana, Nepal, and Vietnam to meet both the economic and immediate social objectives of rural access development programmes. The UK DFID have funded or contributed to three of these programmes and have emphasised community involvement.

Nigeria Case Study

The Ekiti Rural Access Programme (ERAP) is jointly funded by DFID, the Ekiti State Government and six participating local governments. It is a short term programme lasting just 2 years intended as a pilot for future programmes, and includes extensive capacity building, technical assistance and political awareness building measures in addition to capital support. The programme is implemented through existing government agencies with budgetary and technical support from DFID.

Central to the programme is a pro-poor focus on isolated rural communities with the aim of providing improved rural livelihoods through improvements in access. In Ekiti there is an extensive network of rural roads (generally earth surfaced) of about 2,500 km serving a total population of 2 million. Over 90% of the population is employed in agriculture where livelihood indicators fall below MDG targets in most sectors.

Historically, local government is weak, over-staffed and under-funded. The rural road network has been neglected in the past and rural transport is difficult and problematic, particularly in the rainy season. The capacity of all levels of government to maintain the road network has been successively dismantled with the former road gangs disbanded, equipment deteriorating and budgets diverted or suspended completely. The provision of services by the private sector is heavily politicised and potentially corrupt. Contract award procedures lack transparency, and contracts are inadequately supervised, resulting in poor quality work or sometimes no work at all. With the lack of government competence, rural communities have been driven to undertake emergency maintenance themselves using whatever materials are to hand. Such efforts are short lived and generally ineffective.

The programme started by establishing implementation units in each local government, providing them with equipment and vehicles and undertaking an intensive training programme. Simultaneously, existing petty contractors were invited to register their interest in the programme, and after screening, about 40 contractors were given training in technical and financial aspects of tendering and managing contracts.

The implementation units followed Integrated Rural Access Planning methodology to ensure full community participation in the decision making process. The works were designed to be largely labour based, with little requirement for equipment, to increase the potential for direct community involvement in the execution of works bringing the benefits of increased rural employment and incomes. Simplified forms of contract were drawn up and all contracts were awarded after transparent competitive tendering. Substantial technical assistance was provided to the contractors in carrying out the works.

All contractors are local enterprises, usually single owner, with very limited experience, equipment and financial resources. These contractors were defined as “community contractors” and were limited to contracts valued under US\$20,000 and 3 month duration. The contractors were restricted to contracts within their own local government areas to maximise, by their close association with the local communities, local participation and involvement in the works.

Community development officers visited all communities affected by the proposed road improvements to sensitise them on the works to be carried out and requesting their assistance in providing labour and monitoring the contractor’s work.

The first batch of 24 contracts was awarded in October 2004. Initial progress was good, but problems soon emerged in finding sufficient labour at affordable costs. Reasons cited included pressure of farming needs, unattractive wages and working conditions, distrust of contractors, and even seeking “donor gold”. Workshops were held to examine the problem and to seek possible solutions without a satisfactory outcome, and works were finally completed only by permitting the use of graders to carry out the heavier works.

The next batch of contracts was restricted to culvert and small bridge reconstruction and repairs, which, requiring less labour were completed successfully. Future contracts will continue to use community contractors, but the numbers will be reduced to eliminate the less successful contractors and to allow for more intensive management. Community sensitisation has been improved by regular

meetings with communities and the establishment of road user groups.

It was initially intended to carry out routine maintenance by contract, but it was later decided to recruit individual length-workers directly from the communities under short term employment agreements, paying by result, and managed and supervised by local government staff – effectively piece work by direct labour. Once again results were disappointing with very high initial interest resulting in an over subscribing of applicants, but with high fall-out rates when the reality of the effort required became apparent.

As work progressed however, and the “less motivated” workers were replaced, performance has improved. The programme is now experimenting with the contracting of community work groups to undertake routine maintenance of sections of rural roads. Initial indications are that this approach will prove more successful in achieving acceptable performance quality, sustainability and ownership.

Technically, the programme has been successful, as 450 km of rural roads and over 100 major drainage structures have been rehabilitated and are now under regular maintenance. The results achieved by the programme have been hailed by politicians, community leaders and the communities themselves. Communities are showing considerable enthusiasm in participating in the programme and to continue with maintenance after the programme has been completed, without external funding support if necessary, in order to preserve the improvements achieved.

The State and local government staff involved in the implementation of the programme have contributed significantly to this success. Donor intervention was confined to framing an agreed policy, budget and programme, and providing technical assistance, monitoring and evaluation. There is confidence that the programme will continue without external assistance after the programme has been completed in mid 2006.

However, the methods being used have in some cases been less palatable to political leaders and there is work still to be done to persuade them that the physical improvements they have seen will have “pay back” for them in ways other than they traditionally expect.

Working through large numbers of small scale community groups not only provides greater direct community benefits, but also offers far less opportunities for the diversion of funds and resources than larger scale contracting to the private sector. It does however require a considerable investment in training and sensitisation, and involves a very high degree of technical supervision and monitoring, the skills for which are in short supply.

One element missing from the programme was its ability to guarantee continuity of funding after the programme completion. The local governments were required to contribute a percentage of the costs of rehabilitation and maintenance, with the percentage being higher for maintenance and also increasing from the first to second year of the programme in such a way that their actual contribution remained relatively constant throughout the programme. The amount of each local government’s contribution was approximately US\$100,000 per year, which is sufficient, if continued after the programme, to sustain the maintenance of the rural road network.

As a relatively small scale pilot programme, it was accepted that there should be a degree of experimentation as the programme gained from experience with a variety of methods. An extensive mid-term review supported this flexible approach and the lessons learned are being applied in the planning of a larger scale national programme to be funded by the World Bank.

Botswana Case Study

The Botswana routine road maintenance, small and community contractor development programme started in 1998. The purpose of the project was to increase efficiency and develop local capacity to maintain the road network whilst also creating meaningful employment, private sector participation and community ownership in line with Government policies for its National Development Plan 8.

Intended as a demonstration project, the work involved the;

- Development and training of community and local contractors to undertake routine road

maintenance work using community labour.

- Execution of routine road maintenance over a period of 24 months by trained contractors and the communities
- The documentation of lessons learned and the formulation of a coherent strategy for network - wide use of the private sector and community workforce for routine road maintenance.

Within the framework of the NDP, there was a clear Government policy that ‘Labour based components of the social safety net should take the form of permanent programmes to be specifically targeted to the poor’. The Government recognised the important economic role and need for participation of the private sector in infrastructure maintenance, and several schemes for assisting the citizen entrepreneur, including community contractors, were key features of national policy.

Rural access projects and the construction industry contributed over 20% to Botswana’s GDP growth through the 1990’s. Some 87% of project expenditure was provided by the public sector.

Despite its size, rural access programmes and the construction industry had failed to generate a reasonable impact on the rural population in terms of job creation and other opportunities. Thus, building of local capacity and creating job opportunities through an enhanced labour based programme involving the communities was given high priority.

Programme implementation included:

- Detailed review of existing models, design of community participation and contractor development strategy.
- Careful selection of 9 sections of roads ranging in length from 16 km to 40 km to be maintained using small contractors and community labour.
- Undertaking extensive social surveys and consultations to galvanise community ownership, support and participation.
- Creation of an enabling environment in which small contractors and community entrepreneurs can participate in public works, by providing initial and on-the-job training, mentoring, waiving or relaxation of restrictive requirements, assistance with tendering, technical and financial incentives and safety nets.
- Creation of awareness of programme objectives amongst all stakeholders and linking of reward to key success factors.
- Undertaking of physical programme implementation in parallel with further field training.
- Documentation of lessons and development of model and procedures for wider involvement of the private sector and communities throughout the road network.

The benefits of this project have included:

- The creation of substantial employment for the rural poor (over 66,000 worker days) which if expanded, could provide employment for over 7% of the rural unemployed.
- The training and development of over 40 small contractors some of whom are now able to undertake routine road maintenance work using labour from adjacent communities.
- Effective maintenance of the road network which has resulted in, for example, substantial (over 50%) reduction in accidents attributable to animal-vehicle collisions.
- The development of a framework which has resulted in wider involvement of private sector consultants and community contractors in routine road maintenance.
- Improved rural community participation in road maintenance.

Private Sector Development Policies in Botswana

Small and Community contractors are a very valuable national resource and their participation in road works programmes is recognised in terms of their contribution to nation building and self-sufficiency.

However the employment of small contractors on public works programmes presents major challenges and the Government had developed a number of schemes to encourage the participation of small contractors. These include: reservation of certain categories of work, relaxation of tendering procedures, simplified contracts, contract advances, and assistance with payment for professional services.

The availability of these schemes had generally not led to significant improvement in the capacity of the local contracting industry.

Community Participation

Involvement and participation of the communities living adjacent to the road project was tackled at an early stage of the project. Social development experts were engaged to conduct a series of consultation meetings at Village Centres (*Kgotlas*) adjacent to the project roads. The methodology adopted was to organise, through Village chiefs and Headmen, series of Kgotla meetings at each village as well as structured questionnaires.

As well as informing the community of the planned project and soliciting their views, ownership suggestions and participation, the teams also assessed the availability of labour and any gender issues, cultural factors, community dynamics and labour issues that might impact on the project.

Results of the community consultation exercise were incorporated in project implementation plans including Training Needs Analysis, labour management and community consultation.

Observations on Social Conditions in the Villages

The number of workers who registered for work in each village is shown in the table below.

Table 1 Registered available labour along demonstration road sections

Section	Name of Village	Total Registered	Men	Women (all)	Unmarried women with children
Section 1: Dibete – Mahalapye	Dibete	46	22	24	21
	Dinokwe	133	45	88	79
	Mahalapye	58	32	26	15
Section 2: Nokaneng-Sepupa	Nokaneng	96	55	41	38
	Gumare	156	62	94	78
	Etscha 6	203	95	108	86
	Etscha 13	330	132	198	186
	Ikoga	99	49	50	40
Section 3: Lobatse-Ramatlabama	Pitsane	87	60	27	14
	Rakhuna	97	53	44	28
	Ramatlabama	98	56	42	29

The table shows the tendency of women registering for work to outnumber men. The high proportion of unmarried women with children registering for work is noticeable. This group is also the largest disadvantaged group in rural Botswana. Earlier studies in Botswana (BIDPA 1997) have confirmed that income to female headed households were more effective in reducing poverty.

Detailed analysis of the detailed social data provided useful and surprising information on labour patterns, income sources, and levels of poverty.

Employment Creation & gender

In the course of the project, employment has been provided to 174 people per year working full time equivalent. The labour used amounted to over 66, 000 worker days.

Thirty nine percent (39%) of this workforce was female.

More men were employed than women, although more Women (742) had been registered than men (661) for employment during the initial community consultation. The reason for this is not clear. Possible contributory factors include bias of the small contractors or the Kgosi's (through whom labour was recruited) to male labour. A large proportion of the female population who had registered for work were also unmarried women with children. These Women may have been precluded due to maternal duties.

It is projected that over 7% of the current rural unemployed could be employed if the program was expanded to cover the network of 23000Km.

Management and organisation

A key aspect to the success or otherwise of a project of this nature is the institutional and management scenario under which the project is undertaken.

A Task Force comprising Botswana Roads Department, Norwegian Public Roads Administration, NPRA, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and UK Department for International Development (DFID) met quarterly to review and provide general direction to the programme. The overall programme strategy and project specific strategy was developed by the Task Force.

The consultant, Roughton International, had wide regional and international experience in the development of community based road maintenance. The engagement of local expertise such as Social Development Experts helped to enhance in-depth understanding of community culture and structure.

Community Consultations and Pre-selection

The high importance attached to community consultation was pivotal. This exercise helped to understand the key factors that are likely to impact on the project. These factors were then taken into account in the project design. It also helped to engender community interest and participation. All contractors reported good co-operation by the village heads, which assisted them in identification, recruitment and management of labour.

The communities affected by the project showed willingness to participate in future projects and welcomed the opportunity of further employment and the continuation of employment for those already employed.

Training

With respect to routine road maintenance, evidence from the current projects clearly indicates that there are three main areas for targeted training;

- Management of Labour
- Financial and Project Management
- Costing and Bidding

Technical aspects of routine maintenance were generally well understood and applied by the community contractors.

Nepal: A case study

The Road Network Development Project in Nepal has a number of components covering road

improvement and rehabilitation of various sections of the road network. To meet the ‘poverty’ requirement to support the ADB funding it includes the construction of a rural feeder road accessing the many disadvantaged communities in the Eastern hills. For a number of years the UK Department of International Development (DFID) has been active in rural access in Nepal. The Rural Access Programme (RAP) has developed a pro-poor sustainable-livelihoods approach to district and feeder road development, essentially in the rural hill and mountain regions of the country. DFID was keen that the RNDP feeder road embraced the RAP process and negotiated with ADB accordingly. ADB agreed to utilise the RAP process while DFID provided the capital funding.

The RAP process is directed at sustainable livelihoods for the very disadvantaged. Its initial focus was on District Roads providing access at the most basic level. The process involves the construction of the road over a period of some 6 years by community-based road building groups (RBGs). Construction starts in the first year with the clearing of a 2-metre strip, and continues to develop each year to eventually allow regular vehicular access. The time period is designed to provide an adequate income stream to the community groups while they are trained in their chosen future livelihood.

Institutional arrangements for the road sector in Nepal place the strategic road network under the Ministry of Physical Planning and Works. The lowest category in this network is the Feeder Road, providing access as the name implies to an area rather than a more specific location generally covered by District Roads. As such the Feeder Roads carry greater traffic and require a higher specification than the district or community roads. Furthermore the regulation of the road sector within the Roads Department of the MoPPW is stricter than for District Roads under the MoLD. The disparity between government regulation and the requirements for community involvement creates a clear potential conflict.

There is no doubt that the involvement of local communities is a worthwhile ambition. Indeed during the recent insurgency problems in Nepal it has been a vital feature of all road construction in rural areas. Even standard works contracts have been forced to operate such that the contract income remains essentially within the community. The approach is therefore well accepted.

The RAP process involves the selection and development of the RBGs over a period of some months using NGOs. Once ‘trained’ each RBG is offered a similar quantity of work to provide some equality of income over the required period for sustainability.

There are a number of practical situations to be managed in the process. For District Roads the equal workload equates more or less to a similar length of road and each RBG is given approximately 500m of road to develop over the number of years agreed. For Feeder Roads the equality of work is more problematic. The higher alignment standard demands earthworks and the mountain terrain requires substantial lengths of retaining wall. The heavier traffic loading requires a higher standard pavement. The type of work thus changes as the road standard increases. Equality of work cannot be based on road length alone and care is required to arrive at an acceptable solution.

However, by far the greatest problem is the introduction of the construction approach within the Department of Roads’ institutional arrangements and regulations. The RBGs are essentially ‘labour-only’ contractors. The provision of simple hand tools usually adequate for a basic access road needs to be supplemented with materials and transport for the higher standard road. The structures need gabion wire and cement, and the earthworks require additional water and some mechanical compaction. Every item required for construction from the RBG labour-only contract to a bag of cement must be procured under MoPPW regulations. ‘Shopping’ is not encouraged, particularly under the present drive to increase transparency, and a full tender procedure becomes necessary for every item. The process is similar to the direct-labour ‘force account’ which has long since been discouraged by successive agencies. As one Donor commented ‘we have spent 20 years honing government to manage the contract process and move away from force account.....’

Indeed, the procedures within government are so cumbersome and unwieldy that alternative mechanisms are essential, and without which it is unlikely that project objectives will be met.

Vietnam: A case study

The World Bank funded Third Rural Transport Project (RTP3) in Vietnam will implement a programme of up to 4500km of road rehabilitation and maintenance in 33 provinces. The technical assistance for implementation project design has been funded by DFID. The focus of this ‘third’ phase of the programme has shifted to include a Sector Wide Approach or ‘SWAp’ where possible in the provinces. The basic concept of SWAp is that all agencies adopt a unified approach within a particular sector. In the context of this project ‘SWAp’ has been extended to include disbursement of funds through the government mechanisms, which is the logical outcome of a unified approach.

A further feature of the project design is community participation wherever possible, particularly in road maintenance, for all the usual reasons. But here again is the potential conflict. Under many other initiatives, and indeed under this programme, the use of the private sector has been encouraged in the road sector. Thus design consultancies are let to local provincial consultants and works are tendered by domestic contractors. There is a natural tendency for work in an area to benefit the local community, but this is not guaranteed. In the context of Vietnam, attempts to force this through contract obligations can have an unwanted impact on development of the private sector, and can have other social implications.

For this project there could be a partial solution. Within the district and commune structure there still remains a facility for works to be carried out by the local communities and for payment to be disbursed accordingly. Whilst this facility remains, those communities can be encouraged to participate in road works, and in particular in road maintenance, with the consequent benefits. It is however the longer term aim of institutional development that the private sector is used throughout the road sector. It is then that the conflict arises.

DISCUSSION

An Enabling Environment

For the private sector and the communities to work in a mutually beneficial way there must be an acceptance and willingness by implementing Government Agencies to make special provisions.

This should include waiving or relaxation of normal procurement regulations, the provision of direct support/capability building to the private sector as well as participating communities.

Donor agencies and Governments should take a more pro-active role. There needs to be an awareness of the need for modified procedures and the creation of bureaucracy-free, enabling environment. This should form part of the programme design.

In Nigeria the existing systems at local government level were largely dysfunctional, therefore new systems could be put in place with relative ease. In Botswana, the Government through the advice of ILO, DFID and NPRA, recognised the need for creating an enabling environment which resulted in the upfront review and modification of systems to mitigate the private sector – community priority conflict.

Where this potential conflict is not recognised at the programme design stage, and therefore not managed, it can lead to delays and frustration in achieving programme objectives. Appropriate labour laws must also be in place to protect both the small contractor and the community workforce.

Institutional Framework

Experience has shown that community based infrastructure works are more likely to be successful if linked to a dedicated organisation with sole responsibility (and authority) for implementation of the programme.

In Nigeria the State and Local Government implementation units were pivotal to the programme. The State Unit was legislated through the state parliament (House of Assembly) and as such it had legal status.

Where such dedicated organisations cannot be provided, it could be supported by a high level

technical task force with the required authority and expertise as was the case in Botswana.

Experience has demonstrated that it is inappropriate to expect existing Government Agencies and Ministries with responsibility for implementation of larger projects utilising traditional models, rules and regulations to also administer community participatory infrastructure works involving the private sector.

Building Partnerships & Capacity

The community, the private sector and implementing agencies must have a common purpose and ownership of the programme. The use of IRAP worked well in Nigeria. In Botswana a community partnering and consultation scheme proceeded well ahead of the project's implementation. The key is to build genuine partnerships through consultation and linkage to benefits rather than force through the contract. This worked well in Botswana, but proved more problematic in Nigeria.

In order to build sustainability, training and awareness raising should be a key part of the programme. There should be a mechanism for involving private sector on dedicated training schemes which might include direct funding of training schemes for small and community contractors.

Conclusions

The four programmes described in this paper have varying approaches, sources of funding, socio-political settings and cultural norms. Despite these differences, a number of key success factors have been identified, but there is no "one size fits all" solution.

Common to all programmes is the potential conflict in trying to maximise the involvement of both the communities and the private sector.

The key to resolving this conflict is the initial recognition and awareness by programme designers that the problem exists. The solutions will vary depending on local circumstances and specific programme objectives. These solutions are likely to include having the appropriate institutional framework and creating genuine private sector and community partnership, with Governments taking a pro-active role in creating an enabling environment that goes beyond mere policy formulation.

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