



Forum

News

International Forum for Rural Transport and Development

Transport and Cross Border Trade

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Crossing Borders

Although at national level transport serves the needs of economic expansion, territorial control and national unity, at community level it remains primarily a tool for positive social and livelihood change. This is highlighted in Africa's border regions where markets persist in spite of the problematic transport systems inherited from the colonial era and post independence Africa.

Border zones are a hub for economic and social exchange. They have a positive impact upon the local economy, boosting agricultural production, retail opportunities (particularly for women), and the supply of a range of staple food goods, by providing an outlet for sales and exchange. At the national level, cross-border markets, which are a focus for products from different ecological regions, are an efficient catalyst in food security policies, bringing the produce to marginal areas and providing a channel to major urban centres and national markets.

Trading networks have developed in areas of intense pre-colonial trading activity, especially in East and West Africa. Following independence most African countries nationalised agricultural and mining export oriented products. State withdrawal, the end of State monopoly in the cereal trade (in accordance with structural adjustment policies), and the money making campaigns that followed the development of cash crops, have all substantially contributed to the modification of exchange networks. In this organisational vacuum, without efficient distribution networks, rural communities have created their own economic systems based on informal marketing channels. So the borders created at independence have failed to sever social and trading networks particularly in border regions, and people continue to operate within mechanisms beyond the structure of the state.

The transport sector clearly performs a critical role for the transfer of goods and people to cross-border markets. Conventional approaches have favoured capital intensive investments in infrastructure and motorized transport systems, and transport policies have focused on national transport systems that link urban centres with major villages. Consequently transport systems are operating autonomously either side of a border express national policies with differing objectives, and fail to reflect the socio-economic links shared by the societies that straddle these border lands.

As a testament to the strength of these centuries old social and trading relationships, the weakness of transport infrastructure in cross border areas has not halted trade. Goods are transported by all means, from lorries to pick-up trucks, through the whole range of intermediate means of transport (boats, bicycles, motorcycles, carts, etc). Weekly markets are a real hub and perfectly exemplify the complementary nature of transport systems.

Yet the phenomenon of partially or totally landlocked zones in marginal regions has been heightened by the prevailing focus on city-centre rather than network transport systems, and is a major constraint to the improvement of rural livelihoods. Addressing the full range of



A Hub for Transport and Trade, Kindia, Guinea Conakry

transport needs for rural communities, particularly those living in border zones, demands a new orientation in transport policy making. Holistic, integrated policies that address transport issues from a networks perspective would circumvent this artificial barrier of the 'border'.

The presence of socio-economic exchange in cross-border areas does not necessarily translate into strategies for improved mobility that will facilitate and strengthen exchange, or contribute to State integration. There remain major constraints preventing local communities from taking maximum advantage of the economic potential of cross border exchange and from participating fully in the establishment of the macro economic groupings. Poor transport services, a low density of infrastructure and management capacity, and poor local economies are severe bottlenecks to significant improvements in people's mobility. Insecure roadways, expansion of fraud, and the anarchical exploitation of forest resources are also consequences of these weaknesses.

The transport sector has to cope with these challenges. What are the transport strategies required to develop the opportunities that these cross border spaces potentially offer local communities for sustainable improvements to their livelihoods? This is an ignored aspect of the construction of African regional unity that demands a global vision. A vision that will override political frontiers, and take into account the corresponding needs of other sectors; the harmonisation of customs procedures, halting the spread of HIV AIDS, creating safe roadways, and protecting the environment. The challenge will be to entrust the communities and institutions of the cross-border zones with the future of their region and to harmonise transport networks with established cross-border socio-economic spaces.

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In this issue:

1. Crossing Borders
2. Trade, Transport & HIV Aids; Trading Across Lake Victoria; Women Traders Short Changed for Transport
3. Cross Border Business; Cross Border Access for Food Security; New Transport Portal for South Africa
4. IFRTD Africa Regional Meetings; XIV Colombian Symposium on Pavement Engineering; Orinoquia River Transport Forum



Trade, Transport & HIV AIDS

Today any discussion on development is incomplete without addressing the issue of HIV AIDS. In Africa, the pandemic has led to a 10% decline in life expectancy, and has greatly distorted the population dependency structure by depleting the normally productive generation of 18-45 year olds. The consequences are a severe impact on national economies, with an approximate 120% setback in GDP growth rates.

It is important to underscore the links between cross-border trading activities and the spread of HIV AIDS. This provides a better scope for understanding the underlying causes of the problem, and possible ways to reduce the spread and mitigate the impacts.

Trading in general necessitates high levels of mobility, circulation and interaction among people. Cross-border trade in particular takes place along specific border crossing points that are not just places for customs verification, but are also important transport hubs and places of rest for long distance travellers and truckers. Invariably this leads them to become melting pots of unrestrained social life. Typical border points such as Namanga, between Kenya and Tanzania, Busia between Kenya and Uganda, or Beit Bridge between Zimbabwe and South Africa, invite legal trading activities but also attract illegal activities. This creates conditions for multiple sexual contacts and transforms cross-border trading centres into critical points for the spread of HIV AIDS.

It is important to focus on this feature of cross-border interactions and look for ways in which local communities and respective countries can arrest the spread of the disease. In Busia bicycle taxi operators (boda bodas) have been encouraged to take the lead by displaying HIV AIDS awareness materials on their bicycles or on their T-shirts. Such initiatives should be reinforced by a firm policy commitment to develop capacity to monitor and isolate areas and sectors displaying a high disposition towards HIV exposure.

IFRTD networks in East and Southern Africa, funded by the UK DFID are undertaking research into the relationship between transport and HIV AIDS. For more information please contact: Mac Mashiri, Coordinator South Africa NFG Transportek, CSIR, PO Box 395, Pretoria, South Africa Email: mmashiri@csir.co.za

Trading Across Lake Victoria

Lake Victoria, the second largest freshwater lake in the world, is shared by Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, whose riparian communities use it as a resource for food, energy, water and transport. A busy network of waterways link up the islands and trading towns and villages that line the shores.

Cross-border trade on Lake Victoria involves consumer products, textiles, fuel and construction materials. Vessels used range from large barges to rudimentary planked and dug out canoes. In the last 35 years, particularly since the collapse of the "first generation" East African Community, lake based transport has received insignificant policy attention. Prior to this collapse railway and marine transport policies were well harmonised.

With the revival of the East African Community, there is a renewed focus on improving transport in order to facilitate trade, and the management of Lake Victoria is one of the areas that is attracting significant attention. Apart from its rich reservoir of fish, the lake has considerable potential for facilitating transport of people and goods within countries and across borders. However a number of issues need to be prioritised in such a transport agenda, including:

- Improving safety by upgrading navigation charts and control equipment
- Increasing policing to reduce incidences of piracy
- Combating the hyacinth weed that makes transport difficult.
- Improving marine infrastructure particularly on landing sites in the islands and small market centres.
- Facilitating access to improved boat technologies, particularly for the fisher-folk and small-scale traders.

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Women Traders Short Changed for Transport

Women in West Africa actively trade in food and other commodities and are in a position to contribute to increased cross border trade. The predominantly informal nature of their trade makes it difficult to measure their economic contribution at regional and national level, although they make a clear contribution in terms of food security by trading food products from areas of supply to areas of deficit, and through the purchase of services (formally and informally) that create livelihoods for others. Some argue that this parallel economy confines women to low level activities with little opportunity for the accumulation of wealth.

WIDTECH (Women in Development Technical Assistance Project) undertook an assessment of women's cross border trade activities in Benin, Ghana, Mali, Senegal and the border regions of Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire and Nigeria. In these countries women engage in the trade of agricultural produce, processed goods, and light manufactured commodities. The constraints these women face include; customs and other payments, lack of financial services, poor security, lack of business management skills, limited market information and inadequate public and private transportation.

Women utilise both public and private transportation to get their goods across borders to market. Private transportation includes animal drawn carts, cars, small trucks and vans, and large trucks. Women who trade in smaller volumes are disproportionately affected by inadequate transport while those who trade in larger volumes are often able to use

their own trucks and vans. Women also account for 70% of regional public transportation users, and because of the poor state of regional public transportation in West Africa often face long delays. These delays force them to miss regional market days and cause consumable items such as agricultural goods and processed foods to spoil.

A shortage of vehicles to handle large shipments limits the volume of goods women can trade. Women who trade in palm oil, rice, petroleum, dried fish and other goods often organise themselves into convoys and negotiate the transportation of their goods using freight forwarders. Because organising a transportation convoy can take weeks, women who trade in smoke fish along the Burkina faso - Mali border often take the risk of travelling with their goods on the top of vehicles.

Women using public transport services are exposed to increased incidences of physical assault and robbery. Although some traders travel in groups to protect themselves others have stopped travelling to port markets such as Lome and Lagos because of increased experiences of violence at these locations.

Although they are key transport users in the region, West African women traders, marginalised by the informal nature of their work, are being short-changed by the very transport sector their custom helps to perpetuate.

*For more information about the WIDTECH Project please contact:
http://www.widtech.org/Publications/West_Africa_Trade_Final-sm-box.pdf*



Cross Border Business


Focus on Uganda

Africa has about 10% of the world population but plays an insignificant role in international trade. The continent has not developed the production capacity and comparative advantage necessary to fully participate in the global trading process. Inadequate supply capacity, high transport costs, inadequate institutional frameworks and restrictive regulations all increase the time required to get commodities to markets. Studies in Africa demonstrate that land transport alone contributes 30 to 40% of the price of commodities, un-competitive with Asia and Latin America

However a vibrant cross border trade exists between African countries. Operating outside national and regional frameworks this trade is labelled 'informal', often regarded as illegal, and discouraged by customs and government authorities as they believe it contributes to smuggling and revenue losses.

There is a growing realisation and understanding that informal cross border trade is a legitimate form of economic activity that can be traced back to before the colonial era. It offers increased trade, in keeping with traditional African production systems based upon subsistence agriculture, where production levels are too low to benefit from economies of scale. This informal trade contributes to employment, social integration within regions, and food security. In East Africa for example maize is exported to Kenya from Uganda in return for manufactured goods.

Transport plays a crucial role in the facilitation of cross border trade. Where production volumes are low but collection points are widespread, intermediate means of transport (e.g. bicycles, motorcycles, wheelbarrows and boats) can provide the most appropriate and affordable means of trade.

Informal trade like formal trade is competitive and responds to the forces of supply and demand. In a recent water transport study in Uganda, it was revealed that traders dislike oar-powered boats and prefer engine boats for their speed and safety despite higher fares. The boat operators have also responded to market forces by equipping their vessels with containers for ice blocks to preserve fish. See  (www.ruralwaterways.org).

Given the fact that this trade exists, there is a recognised need to overhaul trade policies and procedures to support its development, for example through the simplification of customs procedures and quality assurance standards. Given the dearth of reliable data available on

cross border trade, national observatories collecting data on the trade would be a first step towards effective planning and monitoring.

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Focus on Cameroon

For Cameroon, located at the confluence of other nations and next to the coast, transit and trade are key economic activities. In the border regions both informal and formal trade flourish and many different goods intended for household and companies are exchanged. Here we highlight the impact of transport infrastructure on regional differences in cross border trade and the consequences of these regional differences at local and national level.

In the forest zone of South Cameroon, on the border of Gabon and Guinea Equatorial, physical markets have been established at a recognised location where traders once gathered informally. In this market, exchanges primarily concern pastoral produce and livestock serving food security in the region. In return, Cameroonians buy wines and liqueurs from the other countries. The cross-border transport infrastructure is sufficient for lorries to service these market places, and they are often hired by women from professional groups and/or common initiative groups.

In contrast in the Savannah region of North Cameroon the lack of adequate transport networks across the borders makes them difficult to regulate and fraudulent trading is rife. Nigeria is a big petroleum producer and the trade of petroleum with its neighbours is widespread. On the Cameroon - Nigeria border petroleum trade is essentially smuggling as there is no recognised physical market yet it is still traded using headloading, animal traction, canoes, motorcycles and lorries along the 1000km of border that the two countries share. This business is prosperous and has existed for decades but it is blamed for disruption to the economies of nearby countries and in particular the collection of taxes to finance road maintenance, for example Cameroon relies on fuel taxes to maintain the national road network.

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Cross Border Access for Food Security

Exchange networks from the countries of the Sahel have been trading Ecom, plantain, yams, fruit and cattle for centuries, and these cultural and economic relations among several ethnic groups in the region have a demonstrable influence on the food chain. The economic prosperity of Ghana during the 1950s encouraged the production of cash crops such as coffee and cocoa in Eastern Cote d'Ivoire, and more recently subsistence food products from Northern Cote d'Ivoire can be found in the markets of Burkina Faso.

In order to reduce shortages of food products in some parts of the region while others have plenty, decision-makers have promoted the flow of staple products across national borders. Trade that was once considered illegal received official recognition. Yet despite these liberalisation measures the food chain within and between countries in Sub Saharan Africa has remained characterised by low volume and seasonal price fluctuations, representing a significant risk to food security. In addition there has been no development of infrastructure and services to facilitate this trade and human portage of goods to border roadsides remain the status quo.

Governments of the sub region have tried several measures towards correcting the imbalance of food supply in the region including price regulations, establishment of storage facilities such as cereal banks, and liberalisation of buffer stocks, but none has yielded the expected results and most have been discontinued. No matter how good the market incentives offered to rural communities are, they will be of no use if physical barriers to and from the markets remain high.

IFRTD networks in West Africa have highlighted the importance of cross border trade patterns for regional food security, the impacts and characteristics of which are not fully understood. They are pioneering a research programme to understand the formal and informal trade relations in the region and the implications of improved cross border transport systems for these relationships.

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New Transport Portal for South Africa

Www.sustransa.co.za is a new information and networking web site devoted to sustainable mobility in South Africa. SusTrans SA is a first stop for the latest news on projects in South Africa and also highlights good practice from the rest of the developing world. The site focuses on improvements to public transport, non-motorised transport services, and infrastructure, including South Africa transportation statistics, relevant legislation, planning and design information, as well as financial and environmental management for transportation services. SusTrans SA has been established and maintained by CSIR's Transportek division. If you would like to receive an email alert with the latest news from SusTrans SA each week please email **sustransa@csir.co.za**



News and Events

IFRTD Africa Regional Meetings

IFRTD's regional meetings are the decision making and orientation bodies of the IFRTD at regional level. Elected representatives from these meetings take forward recommendations and priorities to the annual meeting of IFRTD's Advisory Committee. Here we catch up with the latest regional meetings in Africa.

West and Central Africa

This meeting took place in Dakar, Senegal from July 8th to 9th with representatives of the National Forum Groups (NFGs) of Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea Conakry, Chad, Togo and country host Senegal. Discussions focused on a review of activities led in the region during the past year; the process of IFRTD's decentralisation and the identification of transport and accessibility priorities for the region.

Participants highlighted the need to raise the profile of the Forum at regional level to achieve the objectives of decentralisation. A strategy and action plan was elaborated at the conclusion of the debate, referencing good practice noticed in IFRTD Asia and East & Southern Africa where it was observed there is more involvement of funding institutions and partners in activities organised by the Forum at regional or international level.

The adopted action plan prioritises consolidation of the decentralisation process and regional activities focused on the Transport and Poverty theme. These activities will highlight the impact of transport in poverty reduction strategies. Studies will be undertaken within the IFRTD Poverty Watch programme, in Burkina Faso, D.R. of Congo and in Senegal. Outputs will be shared at the regional level through a regional workshop.

Eastern and Southern Africa

IFRTD's Eastern and Southern Africa regional meeting was held in Pretoria, South Africa between 21st and 23rd July 2003. The meeting was attended by National Forum Group (NFG) representatives from Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Zimbabwe and South Africa. Two emerging NFG's, Ethiopia and Zambia, were also represented. In addition to the NFG representatives, authors of the Transport and Poverty country case studies attended to present their reports. Institutional partners attending included ILO-ASIST, CSIR, ATNESA, the National Department of Transport (South Africa) and the National Productivity Institute (South Africa). The meeting was opened by the Deputy Director General of the National Department of Transport and closed by the Director of Transportek, CSIR.

The following were key outcomes of the meeting.

- Each country involved in the transport and poverty work presented their reports and proposals for the next phase of the work. The second phase will focus on dissemination of reports as well as designing policy influencing activities.
- Nominations were made for representation of the region at the annual IFRTD Advisory Committee Meeting, under the new governance structure.
- The regional Co-ordinator was mandated to look at the long-term hosting of the regional secretariat.
- The meeting welcomed the participation of Ethiopia and Zambia into the meeting, and the regional co-ordinator was mandated to support them to become fully fledged NFGs.

For more information please contact relevant IFRTD coordinator – see 'About Us' box.

XIV Colombian Symposium on Pavement Engineering

From the 11th to 14th of June more than 500 participants participated in the Symposium on Pavement Engineering, organised by the Universidad del Cauca, Popayán, Colombia. A well balanced programme reflected the latest technical road pavement issues as well as social and economic issues related to road improvement and maintenance.

Ana Bravo, IFRTD Regional Co-ordinator for Latin America presented the Toolkit for Promoting Sustainability of Rural Transport Infrastructure to the second plenary. Collaboration was encouraged with organisations that would like to test the toolkit in conjunction with advice from the toolkit's original author Laurent Thévoz. In response to the Toolkit the Universidad del Cauca are advocating its socio-political approach to infrastructure management within their curriculum, encouraging students to take a perspective that looks beyond the usual technical aspects of road building.

A CD-Rom copy of the Toolkit was distributed free in the last edition of Forum News. If you have not received yours or would like to receive an extra copy please contact the IFRTD secretariat (see box).



Orinoquia River Transport Forum

The momentum created by IFRTD's Waterways and Livelihood's programme is reflected in the recent founding of the Forum on River Transport and Development of the Colombian Orinoquia. The Forum has initiated a two year research programme on the socio-economic and environmental characteristics of small scale navigation on the Colombian Orinoquia. This research will be a vital addition to the rural water transport sector that lacks reliable data at local, national, and international level.

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About Us:

The IFRTD is a global network of individuals and organisations working towards improved access and mobility for the rural poor. It provides a framework for collaboration, information sharing, debate and advocacy that bridges traditional geographical, academic and institutional boundaries.

Membership of the IFRTD is free. All members receive Forum News and any other publications that are made available to the network. In over 20 developing countries autonomous networks that subscribe to the vision of the international network have become affiliated to the IFRTD as National Forum Groups (NFGs)

The IFRTD is facilitated by a small, decentralised Secretariat based in the UK, Senegal, Kenya, Sri Lanka and Peru.

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**Remember to take a look
at the IFRTD website
www.ifrtid.org**

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