

MAINSTREAMING GENDER IN RURAL ROADS PROJECTS: THE CASE OF THE RURAL ROADS OF PERU¹

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The rehabilitation of rural roads, under the Peru Rural Roads Project (PRR), has contributed to reducing poverty and expanding women's development opportunities in the Sierra of Peru. Whereas economic opportunities seem to have benefited men and women alike, increased access to certain public services such as health, appears to have had a higher impact on women. In addition, safer roads have increased women's mobility choices. Although women's participation in maintenance micro-enterprises remains low, the project has put in place the measures to lift barriers to women's participation and the number of women micro-enterprise members is expected to rise in the near future. Judging by the incipient positive effects of women's engagement in remunerated maintenance work, higher participation of women in micro-enterprises will have important benefits for women, their families and the well-being of their communities and their capacity to emerge from poverty.

While the project did not consider gender in the design of the first phase, a gender study on the impacts of roads rehabilitation on men and women and subsequent gender training to project staff, prompted a gender focus for the second phase of the project. The Peru Rural Roads II made gender equity part of the project's objectives, and targeted women's participation in maintenance micro-enterprises, rural roads committees, as well as income-generating activities. During project implementation, the project has come up with a strategy to increase the participation of women in maintenance activities. The gender mainstreaming process of the project calls attention to the need for strong institutional support to mainstream gender in the so called *hard sectors*.

I. BACKGROUND

1. A high proportion of Peru's poor is concentrated on the highlands of Peru (*Sierra*). Limited local economic opportunities, with smallholder agriculture representing the only available livelihood, are the primary cause of poverty in this region. Lack of local livelihoods is further aggravated by poor access to social and government services, and poor articulation between households and markets due to geographical isolation. To a great extent, isolation stems from the deterioration of existing transport infrastructure, which results in extremely low travel speeds and lack of accessibility year-round.

2. To respond to the needs of Peru highland communities, the Peru Rural Roads project, in operation since 1995, aims at increasing access to basic social services and economic and income-generating activities, by providing a well-integrated and reliable rural road system. The first phase of the PRR, which lasted between 1995 and 2000, reached 12

¹ This report presents findings of a case study of a gender best practice in the Rural Roads sector. The information for the case study is based on two visits to the project that included working sessions with project staff and PRA exercises and focus groups with men and women project beneficiaries from Cuzco, Apurimac, and Ancash. The review of the project documents and interviews with the project task manager completed the information needed for the report. The fieldwork was carried out by Carolina Taborga (FAO) and Maria Elena Ruiz Abril (World Bank consultant). For more information on this report contact mruizabril@woldbank.org.

departments that ranked high in rural poverty in Peru. The second phase of the project is currently under implementation until 2005.

3. Project activities consist of the rehabilitation and maintenance of rural roads through local labor. Following the rehabilitation of the roads, communities take over the maintenance work. For this purpose, the project uses community-based micro-enterprises and rural road committees (*comités viales*). Micro-enterprises comprise between 10 to 15 members which are responsible for maintaining approximately 35 km of road. Micro-enterprise members are paid to carry out daily labor intensive maintenance activities such as cleaning ditches and culverts, controlling the vegetation, filling potholes and ruts, removing small landslides etc. Rural roads committees, usually during weekends, are organized around community work for the maintenance of paths. Although their work is non-remunerated, municipal authorities usually provide food and beverage during the maintenance activities. The focus of this case study is on the activity of micro-enterprises only.

II. GENDER ISSUES IN RURAL ROADS PROJECTS

4. **Gender differentiated impact of rural roads rehabilitation.** Because of their different gender roles, rural men and women perform different daily activities involving different types of trips and therefore, the rehabilitation of roads benefits men and women in different ways. For example, a study elaborated by the PRR² revealed that, while women traveled more frequently to markets, schools, health centers and to visit acquaintances, men primarily used the roads to go to work as well as to sort out administrative diligences in town. While men and women alike benefited from expanded employment opportunities in nearby towns, women benefited more from access to health services, from time saved in reproductive work and from increased mobility. Women's use of health services following the roads rehabilitation, increased more than that of men. The arrival of food products and small domestic appliances, and the reduction in time to gather wood and other domestic inputs, reduced women's household burden considerably. Similarly, as roads became safer, women traveled more often and for longer distances.

5. **Gender issues in rural roads maintenance.** The participation of women in roads maintenance tasks is rather limited due to stereotypes and social prejudices about women's involvement in physically demanding work. As mentioned before, road maintenance is a labor intensive activity, and is perceived by many in local communities as not being appropriate for women. Men and women project beneficiaries alike, as well as some project staff members, share this view, with negative consequences for women participation in maintenance works. Very often, projects fail to publicize their activities (in the case of this project, employment opportunities in maintenance micro-enterprise) among local females. In other cases, even when women know of the project, they do not apply for maintenance positions as they think they are only open to men.

6. In reality, the experiences from the PRR and other roads maintenance projects show that women can do the job. For example, micro-enterprises comprised entirely of women,

² CENTRO, Efectos de los caminos rurales en las relaciones de genero. Agosto, 1999, Lima: CENTRO

such as the one in Puno (Peru) or the one in Los Altos del Masaya in a similar project in Nicaragua, carry out maintenance works with high quality standards.

7. Besides, evidence from the PRR suggests that in mixed-sex micro-enterprises, there exists a gender division of labor that fits maintenance work very well. While men handle heavy tasks such as landslides management, both women and men perform the lesser labor intensive and more repetitive jobs such as cleaning ditches, filling holes, controlling the vegetation, etc. On the occasions that the micro-enterprise spends nights outside the community, traditional gender roles tend to prevail and women are responsible for the cooking. According to the spouses of micro-enterprise members, eating warm food once a day reduces the risk of their husbands' getting sick and losing their income for a few days while recovering.

III. GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN THE PERU RURAL ROADS

8. **While gender was not considered during the project design, actions related to gender were taken during the implementation phase of the Peru Rural Roads I.** Gender was not under consideration during the preparation of the first Peru Rural Roads project and no explicit mention to it appeared in the project appraisal document. However, this did not preclude the project from taking two important steps during project implementation: the commissioning of a study on the gender differentiated impacts of roads rehabilitation; and, a gender training workshop for project staff.

9. **The results of the study spurred a gender focus for the second phase of the project.** The study, carried out in 1999 at the end of the first phase of the project, revealed that gender imbalances determine how men and women benefit from roads rehabilitation. Following the study, the project organized a workshop to train the staff from the Social Promotion Unit of the project on gender. The workshop, carried out during the interface between the Peru Rural Roads I and II, tried to illustrate how gender issues cut across roads rehabilitation activities using evidence from rural areas of Peru.

10. **Gender was well integrated in the design of the Peru Rural Roads II.** The second phase of the project was conceived with a gender focus since the design as several actions taken during project preparation demonstrate. Gender equity was made explicit as part of the project objective (see box besides). As the social assessment paid due attention to gender issues, the stakeholder analysis and outreach strategy identified women as a vulnerable group among all beneficiaries and called attention to the risk of low participation of women in micro-enterprises and rural roads committees. Consequently, the project designed a new income-generating initiative (Local Development Window -LDW) and established targets for the participation of women in micro-enterprises, rural roads committees, and LDW projects.

Increase access to basic social services and economic and income-generating activities with gender equity, to help alleviate rural poverty and raise living standards of communities in Peru

11. **A series of events led to the strengthening of the project's gender focus during the implementation phase.** In March and June 2002, two missions visited the project to assist the Project Implementation Unit (PIU)

with the implementation of gender related activities³. In between the gender missions, and during a joint World Bank-Inter American Development Bank supervision mission, a matrix defining specific gender targets for the implementation phase as well as follow up actions, was drafted by staff from the Project Implementation Unit and the two Banks (see extract below). Although it might not seem very relevant, the draft of the matrix sent a strong message to project staff to take gender activities seriously during project implementation as the supervision mission specifically enquired about progress in gender and linked it to the overall project performance. It must be noted that, overall, gender aspects of projects do not tend to receive much attention during supervision missions.

Table 1. Extract from Peru Rural Roads Gender Matrix

Area	What do we want to achieve in the next five years ⁴ ?	What do we need?	What resources do we have?
Family	Contribute to decreasing alcohol consumption, and domestic violence in the communities where we work	Information	Gender impact study Gender trained staff
Community	Men and women participate equally in local development window projects	Training to LDW staff Indicators	FAO-WB gender technical assistance mission Gender training to decentralized units staff
Micro-enterprises	Men and women have equal opportunities to participate in micro-enterprises	Information campaign promoting women's participation	Design a gender action plan Look for resources to implement it
Other institutions	Raise awareness of gender issues in other institutions dealing with poverty programs	Partnerships with government agencies and NGOs	Inter-institutional agreements

Source: Extract from *Gender vision, integrating gender progressively*, Peru Rural Roads II *Aide Memoire*, April 2002

12. **Following the gender technical assistance missions, an action plan to increase the participation of women in micro-enterprises was proposed.** As women participation in micro-enterprises proved to be low (around four percent of total micro-enterprise members), the technical assistance focused on identifying the problems that prevented women from participating in this component of the PRR. The review of the project operational manual revealed that certain operational procedures were, inadvertently, impeding the participation of women; particularly, during the promotion and constitution of the micro-enterprises. Accordingly, the plan proposed to change the way in which the project was advertised in the communities as well as to modify the micro-enterprise members' selection criteria. In addition, the plan proposed a series of measures aimed at building the capacity of the project to implement its gender focus. The plan built on broad consultation with the staff from the Peru Rural Roads (see box 1).

³ The missions comprised a gender consultant from the Women's in Development Service of the FAO and another from the Gender Unit of the Latin America and the Caribbean Region of the World Bank

⁴ The table was drafted in April 2002

- **Changing the way micro-enterprises are created.** The main factors responsible for women's low participation in the micro-enterprises were: (a) women's lack of knowledge about the project, and/or women's assumption of the maintenance work and therefore micro-enterprise membership as only open to local males; and (b) the definition of criteria to select members of micro-enterprises disfavored women. To address the former, the plan suggested that the project be advertised among local women organizations; the promotion campaign included a description of maintenance tasks to be carried out and explicitly encourage women to participate. For its part, the membership requirements were adapted to redress women's implicit disadvantages. For example, instead of requiring previous experience in road maintenance, it was suggested that experience in specific maintenance tasks was required. This helped women's participation, as women in the Sierra are actively engaged in agriculture and many of the roads maintenance tasks are similar to some agricultural tasks. Similarly, the plan proposed to consider women's experience as household managers as managerial experience; and, women organizations leaders were considered, together with formal local institutions' leaders, for the entrepreneurship attitude requisite⁵.

Box 1. Designing a Gender Action Plan for the Peru Rural Roads

Assessing strengths and limitations to mainstreaming gender. During a first mission, the two gender consultants met with staff from the PIU and reviewed relevant project documents to gain a sense of the project operations and identify relevant gender issues. This mission also served to:

- Identify the capacity of the project to implement gender activities in terms of human and financial resources. While there were no specific human and financial resources allocated to gender, flexibility to rearrange budget lines to target money and staff time to gender work existed. A good candidate to serve as a gender central focal point was identified at this stage.
- Find out how the internal institutional dynamics would affect the implementation of the gender plan. The Social Promotion Department strongly supported mainstreaming gender within the project. At the same time, however, the concerns of a significant number of engineers within the project over the negative impact of female work on the project's ability to meet its efficiency targets, could, in principle, work against mainstreaming gender in the project.

Analyzing operational procedures through a gender lens. In between missions, the consultants exhaustively reviewed the project operational manual identifying gender biases in the different operational procedures. Following that, during the first two days of the second mission, the consultants discussed their findings with the staff member from the Social Promotion Department who had been identified during the first mission as the possible central gender focal point.

Promoting ownership of the plan. The consultant findings and discussions with the staff served to design a series of exercises that would be the basis of a one-day workshop with about 30 staff members from the Social Promotion Department. Their knowledge of the project, of micro-enterprise operations and of social issues was very easily channeled towards an in-depth gender analysis of the project's operational procedures, the result of which was the gender action plan.

⁵ The project valued positive leadership qualities and an entrepreneurial spirit in potential micro-enterprise members.

- **Building the capacity of the project to implement gender activities.** The plan proposed to provide gender training to staff members and to create a network of gender focal points across the project. Given the decentralized structure of the project, with implementation units in 12 different provinces, the idea was to allocate 20 percent of the time of one of the social workers in each decentralized unit, and another in the central unit, to gender tasks. The role of the decentralized focal points would basically consist of watching out for discrimination of women during the micro-enterprise constitution, collecting the information needed to feed certain gender progress indicators, and, periodically reporting gender progress to the decentralized unit coordinator as well as to the central focal point. The central focal point would act as a coordinator and would integrate periodical reports to inform the project management on the progress on gender. It was proposed that all the focal points receive a week of very specific gender training targeted to the infrastructure sector and maintenance activity.

13. **The implementation of the gender action plan is ongoing.** The gender action plan was cleared by the project and the funding agencies, and resources were allocated to gender activities.

IV. GENDER IMPACTS OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN MICRO-ENTERPRISES⁶

14. **Women's participation in micro-enterprises has positive impacts for them as well as for their families' and their communities' well-being.** This section briefly describes the benefits for men and women micro-enterprise members and their families and communities as a result of their participation in the micro-enterprises. Women's participation in micro-enterprises has led to increased household security, and positive social behavior on the part of men by the means of reduced alcohol consumption. Besides, women's work in micro-enterprises is contributing to changing traditional gender roles.

15. **Women's involvement in micro-enterprises has helped to secure the livelihoods of female headed households and reduce poverty.** Overall, micro-enterprise members, both men and women, tend to be heads of their households. Before working for the project, men worked in subsistence agriculture, as wage agricultural workers, or migrated to nearby towns or to Lima. As for women, before joining the micro-enterprise, they cultivated the family plot, worked in the informal sector, or migrated to nearby towns, usually to do domestic work. Local work in the micro-enterprise provides men and women with a regular income throughout the year, securing their often limited household livelihoods. Female-headed households represent a high proportion of the total number of households in the highlands of Peru (CENTRO, 1999). As lack of employment hits these households hardest, women's micro-enterprise work has important repercussions in the reduction of poverty in the Peruvian Sierra.

⁶ This section is based on the interviews and focus groups with men and women micro-enterprise members and their spouses in four communities during a field visit to the department of Ancash. A total of 44 micro-enterprise members (38 men and 6 women) and 25 spouses (24 women and a man) were interviewed. The small size of the sample allows for the tentative identification of effects but precludes a definitive impact analysis.

16. **Work in the micro-enterprise is improving men's social behavior.** The codes of conduct established by the micro-enterprise, the peer pressure, and the high competition in the communities to be part of the micro-enterprise, have led to exemplary behavior from men and women micro-enterprise members. It is worth noting that, although alcohol consumption and domestic violence are common problems in these communities, no case of domestic violence or alcoholism and drunkenness was reported among the families of micro-enterprise members. In addition, men declared to feel satisfied as they are now able to provide for their families, and own the micro-enterprise instead of working as wage workers. Men's ability to fulfill their breadwinner role will surely have important material benefits for their family. However, even more importantly, it may have positive repercussions in intra-household relations as men feel less insecure and disempowered; feelings that often trigger domestic violence.

17. **Women's work in micro-enterprises is leading to changes in gender roles and social perceptions about women.** Despite initial criticism of women's involvement in a sector of activity perceived as exclusively appropriate for males, women's engagement in maintenance work is contributing to changing local perceptions of women's role in society. Their work as maintenance micro-enterprise members has become widely accepted. According to some of the women, this will likely help change traditional notions of what is socially appropriate for women and this in turn may lead to more equal gender relations in the future.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

18. **Conclusions.** The rehabilitation of rural roads has benefited men and women in the Sierra of Peru by placing them closer to markets, people, and the world in a sense. According to the gender study⁷ commissioned by the project, whereas economic opportunities seem to have benefited men and women alike, increased access to certain public services such as health appear to have had a higher impact on women. Most importantly, safer roads have expanded the, very often limited, mobility opportunities of women.

19. Although women's participation in micro-enterprises remains low, the project has put in place the measures to lift barriers to women's participation, and the number of women micro-enterprise members is expected to increase in the near future. Judging by the incipient positive effects of women's engagement in remunerated maintenance work, higher participation of women in micro-enterprises will have important benefits for women, their families and their communities in terms of well-being and capacity to emerge from poverty.

20. **Lessons learned from the gender mainstreaming process.** This section reflects on the experience of gender mainstreaming undergone by the Peru Rural Roads and analyzes the factors contributing to the success of the project in integrating gender issues into its work. In particular, the case of the Peru Rural Roads highlights the crucial role of institutional support, the advantages of a gender aware project design, and the importance of capitalizing on existing human and institutional resources:

⁷ CENTRO, Efectos de los caminos rurales en las relaciones de genero. Agosto, 1999, Lima: CENTRO

- **Institutional support at the project and funding agency level is key to integrating gender in infrastructure projects.** Convincing an audience of engineers of women's capabilities to do physically demanding work is sometimes difficult. In general, integrating gender in *hard sectors* is particularly complicated as the rationale for giving women a role in a construction project might be less apparent than, for example, in the case of a nutritional program⁸. Therefore, the more support the project staff is able to gather to implement gender activities, the easier the job of gender mainstreaming becomes. In the case of the Peru Rural Roads, the institutional support from the project implementation unit as well as from the funding agencies (World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank) has proven crucial. At the project level, the director and the Social Promotion Department have played this role. The latter by embracing the proposals of the gender action plan and spurring the project machinery to put them in place; the former by giving his consent. This has been complemented with a clear message coming from the Banks about the importance of gender in the project through their subsequent missions, as well as with the allocation of specific resources for gender activities. Although institutional support is always important, in sectors where the rationale for integrating gender is not crystal clear it becomes a necessary condition.
- **A gender aware project design facilitates gender work during the implementation phase.** Although as the first phase of the Peru Rural Roads shows, the lack of gender consideration in the design of a project does not preclude gender actions taking place during execution; a good integration of gender in the design can maximize the impact of the gender activities. For example, the gender specific information gathered during the Social Assessment, identifying women as potentially left out groups of beneficiaries, helped to open the dialogue about specific actions and strategies to target women in the PRR. Most importantly, having gender equity as part of the project objective has been important in achieving the degree of attention given to gender issues during the Peru Rural Roads II. In repeated occasions, the task manager has referred to this as the single most important element to justify the allocation of human and financial resources to work in gender.
- **Building on existing human and institutional resources enhances the capacity of the project to do gender work, and guarantees the sustainability of gender actions.** Institutional support from the PIU, the funding agencies, or the project document (by the means of gender aware design) is important but not enough. Certain capacity to develop the gender work is needed. As mentioned before, the action plan issued a series of recommendations to enhance this capacity. However, it is even more important, to identify and build on existing resources. In the case of the Peru Rural Roads, the Social Promotion Department of the project represented a vast amount of untapped resources to carry out gender work: (a) the existence of the Social Promotion Department itself as a legitimate space within the project institutional structure to carry out social analysis; and (b) a well-equipped

⁸ Not necessarily because of women's traditional role in the domestic arena but because of the direct benefits for family members as a result of women's involvement in health and nutrition programs extensively reported in the literature.

team, comprised of social scientists eager to take on the work on gender as a way of gaining leverage within the project, represented invaluable assets in the PRR. The participation of the staff from the Social Promotion Department in the design of the action plan (a) ensured a good match between the plan proposals and the needs of the project; (b) guaranteed project ownership of the plan, which in turn, will have positive effects in terms of sustainability of the gender work; and (c) enhanced the capacity of the Social Promotion Department to carry out gender analysis.

- **Gender champions are crucial to attracting attention to gender issues over time and contributing to sustained gender work.** In the case of the PRR, the social development staff member of the WB resident mission in Peru was another important resource on which the project drew. She has played a key advocacy role throughout the life of the project by raising the issue of gender time and again in front of task managers and PIU staff. She was an important agent behind the drafting of the gender matrix of the project. Her work has contributed to keep the momentum around gender issues in the project and thus avoiding the evaporation of the interest in gender after the initial stage.