

Post 2015: Prospects for a More Visible Role for Transport in the Sustainable Development Agenda

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Abstract: The last three years have seen activities towards developing a new international development framework to succeed the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2015. In September 2014, the UN Open Working Group [OWG] on Sustainable Development Goals [SDGs] presented the Final Outcome Document containing 17 Goals to the UN General Assembly [UNGA]. A final document is expected to be adopted at a meeting of Heads of States and Governments in September 2015. In many developing countries, spatial patterns of poverty, food insecurity, maternal health and child mortality highly correlate with remoteness and lack of transport. According to the World Bank, transport puts development goals within reach through its enabling role to other sectors of a nation's economy (World Bank, 2008). Achievement of many development targets such as the ones proposed in the SDG are highly dependent on the availability, reliability and affordability of transport. The SDG framework that is now in its final stages of negotiations does not make explicit recognition of transport as a key enabler in achievement of many of the proposed Goals. This paper argues that for sustainable development to be achieved, the profile of transport as an enabler of inclusive growth and a key to poverty eradication should be strengthened in the SDG framework.

Key Words: Transport, sustainable development, post 2015 agenda.

1. Introduction

The global development agenda over the past 15 years has been centred on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which encapsulate a set of eight targets in the areas of poverty alleviation, education, gender equality and empowerment of women, child and maternal health, environmental sustainability, reducing HIV/AIDS and communicable diseases, and building a global partnership for development.

The MDGs come to an end in 2015 and will be succeeded by Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are supposed to run for a period of 15 years until 2030. As was the case with the MDGs, the SDGs will focus attention and mobilize resources to address the major gaps in human development.

Central to the post-2015 development agenda is eradicating extreme poverty from the face of the earth by 2030.¹ The World Bank² (1999) defines poverty as

a multidimensional phenomenon, encompassing inability to satisfy basic needs, lack of control over resources, lack of education and skills, poor health, malnutrition, lack of shelter, poor access to water and sanitation, vulnerability to shocks, violence and crime, lack of political freedom and voice.

A wealth of literature provides analytical and empirical evidence linking transport and poverty (Titheridge *et al* 2014, Lucas 2012, Booth *et al* 2000). A lack of assets can be worsened by poor transport provision, increasing barriers to access activities and leading to processes of social exclusion. Conditions of social vulnerability force people in poverty to live in less attractive areas, with no access to jobs and poor transport provision. Poor people are more likely to depend on walking, make fewer but distant trips per capita and spend a disproportionate amount of their income on transportation costs. The poor in urban areas often live in peripheral, marginalized locations and thus face

¹ United Nations. The report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. 2013

² <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/overview#1>

severe service access problems (Booth *et al* 2000). Transport is thus one of the building blocks of economic transformation and growth that delivers social inclusion and sustainable development.

Transport is a key means in strengthening and diversifying livelihoods, widening the horizons of opportunities and therefore providing pathways out of poverty. According to Sierra (2008) transport plays a catalytic role in development. “Around the world, in much of development work, transport is the ultimate enabler. By serving other sectors of a nation’s economy, it puts development goals within reach...for instance, an estimated 75 percent of maternal deaths could be prevented through timely access to childbirth-related care, facilitated by transport” (World Bank, 2008 pp ix)

Despite its widely acknowledged facilitative role in development, transport is almost invisible in the current September 2014 draft of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) framework of 17 Goals, and 169 targets. The SDG framework mentions transport only marginally under the Goal on: “Cities and Human Settlements” namely Target 11.2. The target reads: “By 2030, provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons (UN Open Working Group pp 17). Not having a stand-alone sustainable transport goal and limiting its inclusion to one out of the 169 targets in the post-2015 development framework reduces the visibility of the strategic role that transport is to play in delivery of other goals.

Drawing on written, printed and Internet sources, this paper draws attention to the interaction between transport infrastructure and services and the different dimensions of poverty at both the micro and macro levels. It identifies ways in which the profile of transport can be made more visible within the post-

2015 development agenda. The premise of the paper is that transport affects critical factors that contribute to poverty risks including income, opportunity, security and empowerment. Furthermore, unsustainable transport causes both deprivation and inefficiencies in the economy. While the various dimensions of poverty are distinctly defined and treated under separate headings, there are synergetic linkages between them.

The contextual setting of the paper is the five “big transformative shifts” identified in the Report of the UN Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel (HLP)³ of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (UN, 2013). The shifts are i) Leave no one behind; ii) Put sustainable development at the core; iii) Transform economies for jobs and inclusive growth; iv) Build peace and effective, open and accountable institutions for all; and v) Forge a new global partnership. The heading of the sections that follow are based on the principles implied by these shifts.

2. Transport and Economic Growth

Economic growth with redistribution is one of the key pathways to the eradication of poverty in the world. Indeed, one of the proposed big transformative shifts in the post-2015 development agenda is to “transform economies for jobs and inclusive growth”. Empirical evidence suggests a strong correlation between efficient, effective and equitable transport on the one hand, and economic growth on the other (Rodrigue 2013, Leunig 2011, Krugman 1991). Mobility facilitates the movement of passengers, freight and information and thus underlies economic activity. Efficient transport reduces cost and time and promotes greater mobility. This enhances opportunities for exploitation of geographical comparative advantages, economies of scale as well as scope in production, distribution and consumption thus enhancing productivity of capital and labour. The resulting multipliers effects include better accessibility to wider

³ Co-chaired by the Presidents of Indonesia and Liberia and the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom

and diverse markets, employment and additional investments. In the agricultural sector, for example, transport plays an important role in providing access to input and commodity markets, incentivising commercial production, improving efficiency of value chains and reducing post harvest losses.

Transport influences the potential for supply responses as well as the impact of policy. Accordingly, efficient transport and the greater mobility it confers is a catalyst for economic growth. Geographical isolation limits participation in labour and product markets and results in low incomes and consumption as well limited accumulation of capital assets. Poor people are disproportionately affected due to restricted mobility and, therefore, miss opportunities to participate in economic activity. This is especially so in the agricultural sector, which, in many developing countries, is characterized by geographically dispersed farmers who rely on good transportation facilities to access the market

It is estimated that over 900 million people worldwide do not have all-season road access and about 300 million do not have motorized access at all (Hine 2014). In the widespread absence of affordable and reliable motorised transportation across sub-Saharan Africa, non-motorised transport as well as walking and head loading predominate as the means of transport to transport water, collect firewood, market produce and access to various services. Studies indicate that rural households in Africa spend a considerable proportion of their working day on meeting transport requirements (Masekoameng *et al* 2005, Urasa 1990, Eberhard 1986) estimated at between 2000 to 4000 hours per year (i.e., 34%-68% of working hours) on household transport Hine (2015) In terms of effort women shoulder a disproportionate burden estimated at between 75 to 85 % of the total household transport needs.

Poor transport causes both deprivation and inefficiency. Consequently, to transform economies for jobs and inclusive growth, transport should be better

articulated in the goals and respective targets of the post-2015 development framework. Those way economic opportunities will be expanded, livelihoods will be improved and growth will be more inclusive.

3. Transport and Human Development

Transport influences the degree of access to and utilisation of health services, safe water as well as school enrolment and attendance. Lack of transport services and infrastructure contributes to inability to strengthen human capabilities. Rural communities cannot access services either due to unreliable or unsafe transport services, prohibitive transportation costs or long distances to facilities. On the supply side, lack of transport infrastructure and services may constrain the delivery of key public services particularly in rural areas.

One of the most challenging barriers to providing quality health care is the lack of transportation. Maternal, neonatal and infant mortality are inextricably linked to access to health. A growing body of literature acknowledges that poor physical access is a significant factor in the limited number of women giving birth in health facilities in sub-Saharan Africa and in the significant number of rural women who die when giving birth because of medical complications (Transaid 2013).

Physical access to secondary school is an important predictor of enrollment for girls. Anecdotal evidence suggests that parents reportedly do not send their girl children to school if they have to walk long distances in relatively unsafe environments (Tanzam 2014a). Improving transport infrastructure and services has the potential to improve the proportion of people who are able to access quality education and skills. It can also increase poor people's access to health services, enable better servicing of health outposts, increase the flow of health information and can facilitate the movement of health extension workers. Improved access can also help improve the accessibility of safe water supplies, which has positive consequences for health.

Considering its crosscutting nature and the enabling role it plays in the delivery of socio-economic services, a transport dimension should be given due consideration across all applicable sustainable development goals and targets and more specifically health, education, agricultural extension, water and the environment. Additionally, the post-2015 development framework should include minimum standards of (physical) access across all the relevant goals. These would help monitor progress and ensure that no geographical location, population, group or individual is left behind.

4. Transport and Social Inclusion

The post-2015 development agenda proposes the principle: “Leave no one behind”. This is through - *inter alia* - ensuring that no person – regardless of ethnicity, gender, geography, disability, race or other status – is denied universal human rights and basic economic opportunities. Empirical evidence suggests that lack of mobility is inextricably linked to multiple forms of exclusion and marginalization (Tanzarn, 2013, Lucas, 2012). Lack of transport services and infrastructure can be a contributory factor to creating an environment characterized by voicelessness and lack of links with the broader society. Accessibility in terms of ease and ability of reaching desired destinations is the most defining predictor of choice, opportunity as well as utilisation of services. Accessibility is also important for the disadvantaged because of its role in maintaining the social relations forming the safety net of poor people.

Improved access and mobility are critical for reducing isolation, vulnerability, and dependency of socially excluded people. Long distances, poor infrastructure, prohibitive transport costs, inefficient and inappropriate transportation, time poverty, personal insecurity as well as restricted mobility impose particular limitations on the economic and social participation of disadvantaged groups such as women and persons with disability. For that reason, the

majority tend to work at, or closer to home where they attain marginal returns on their labour. This serves as a disincentive for increased production with resultant negative impacts on livelihoods.

As regards gender inequality, in most of rural Africa, this is largely rooted in women’s work burden, which is associated with constrained mobility and accessibility. Women are assigned the responsibility of provisioning the rural household with its energy, water and food. Women sometimes have to travel long distances without the benefit of time or energy saving technology that would make these tasks easier and more convenient. Whereas there is no medical evidence of the impact of physically carrying loads over long distance, there are indications that this can lead to physical damage to the back and neck (Porter *et al* 2013).

Absence of transport can lead to social, economic and political disconnection and fragmentation. A well-developed transport system is critical in the ever-globalizing world where economic opportunities are increasingly related to the mobility of people, goods and information (Njenga 2012). Transport has a strategic function of creating a broad range of “connectedness” through economic interdependence, social and cultural interaction and development of the notion of global citizenship (Njenga 2013)

The post-2015 development agenda should include an explicit statement about the role of transport in reducing inequality and promoting integration and equity within and among countries, promoting gender equality and social inclusion of people living in poverty, those with disabilities, women, civil society and indigenous and local communities, traditionally marginalized groups.

5. Transport, Security and Peace Building

The post-2015 development agenda calls for a fundamental shift to recognize peace and good governance as core elements of wellbeing. Empirical evidence suggests that there is a positive relationship

between the extent and efficiency of a country's road network and its ability to address internal conflict (Tanzam 2014b, Kilcullen, 2008). Transportation infrastructure shrinks time-space and cost-space, thus enabling the government to respond to security challenges more efficiently (Do and Iyer, 2010). Amongst other things, conflict are attributed to physical isolation arising out of poor provision, funding and maintenance of infrastructure.

Drawing on research in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Tanzam (2014b) reports that during war, there is a near absence of road transport and motorised traffic is almost non-existent even where roads were in a good condition. Even where transport is available, the cost was exorbitant and the frequency of service very poor. As a result, transport is unresponsive and uncompetitive and this limited people's mobility restricted their utilization of services and resulted in a low movement of goods.

Transport interventions and construction of new transport infrastructure can exacerbate exposure to risk. Increased mobility may be associated with exposure of communities to new diseases through in or out-migration. As happened recently, some areas and communities in West Africa had to be virtually shut down to contain the spread of the deadly Ebola. In some worst AIDS-afflicted countries, the highest HIV prevalence rates are found on major transport routes and truck drivers are frequently considered a high-risk group.

6. Conclusion

This paper has argued that for sustainable development to be achieved, the profile of transport as an enabler of inclusive growth and a key to poverty eradication should be strengthened in the SDG framework. There exist multiple entry points to enhance the profile of transport in the post-2015 development agenda, in particular considering the 'facilitating' role of transport in most human endeavours. The role of transport is pervasive throughout the economy and across sectors.

It is this ubiquitous but often underestimated role of transport that needs to be underlined in the remaining window of opportunity before September 2015 when the curtain comes down on the MDGs and raised on the SDGs framework.

To ensure that the post 2015 agenda is transformative for the lives of the poorest and most marginalized the following transport access and mobility targets have been proposed (See Starkey P., Huizenga C., 2014).

- Secure universal access by sustainable transport for rural populations by 2030.
- Secure universal access by sustainable transport for urban populations by 2030.
- Facilitate national inclusion and regional connectivity by sustainable multi-modal freight

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