

Examples of Research Topics

Mobilising communities: strengthening transport systems for obstetric emergencies in Tanzania

An impact study of the Riders' for Health motorbike ambulances in Zimbabwe

Mobility in Relation to Maternal and Child Health in Flores, an island in Eastern Indonesia

Mobility and Health in the Peruvian Amazon: a case study of indigenous communities

WHY NETWORKED RESEARCH?

One of the major challenges for research relating to development and poverty reduction is to ensure that the research findings are relevant to, and are taken up by, poor people and/or the people or organisations working with them.

IFRTD's response to this challenge has been to develop a research methodology that builds ownership and communication into the design of the research programme itself. The methodology brings together people from different contexts to work together and build a common analytical framework. This has demonstrated several significant impacts:

- The creation of a thematic community of practice that encourages learning and sharing across geographical and hierarchical boundaries
- The harnessing of local knowledge, experience and latent research skills
- National ownership of the research theme and findings
- The stimulation of debate at the national and local level
- Creating opportunities for raising awareness of the issues and getting a wide range of stakeholders committed to their resolution
- Cost effectiveness
- Wider and interactive dissemination of the research findings

WHAT IS THE IFRTD?

The International Forum for Rural Transport and Development (IFRTD) is a global network of individuals and organisations working together towards improved access and mobility for the rural poor in developing countries. We aim to achieve our mission by strengthening and supporting networking, identifying priority issues for change, and pursuing a programme of targeted advocacy and research.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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Mobility & Health

An International Networked Research Programme

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The International Forum for Rural Transport and Development (IFRTD), in collaboration with the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the Swiss Resource Centre and Consultancies for Development (Skat) and the Swiss Centre for International Health (SCIH) as part of the Swiss Tropical Institute, is carrying out a two-year networked research programme on the links between Mobility and Health, which started at the beginning of 2006.

The programme has three objectives:

- (1) To increase the understanding of the impacts of mobility constraints on the health, well-being and issues of poor people in different developing country contexts
- (2) To develop tools that will enable transport professionals to include holistic health impact assessments and mitigation measures in the planning, design and implementation of transport interventions
- (3) To develop an advocacy programme to sensitise the health sector to mobility and health issues

THE ISSUES

The significant contribution of transport and mobility to development and the livelihoods of poor people is widely recognized. However, the development sector is yet to fully acknowledge and understand the role of transport in improving poor people's health. In the context of the need to step up development activity to meet the **Millennium Development Goals**, a better understanding of the relationship between mobility and health becomes a priority.

Research on mobility and health has concentrated on northern and high income settings and on issues such as transport and safety, environmental health and the international spread of infections. There is little research on issues relating to southern, low-income and very poor settings. Most of the research in developing country contexts is confined to issues such as the rural-urban HIV diffusion and ways to mitigate this and, related to this, some research on transport workers, migrants, tourists, construction workers, the sex trade and patterns of sexual activity. Some research has looked at water management issues in the construction of roads and the potential for the spread of malaria, bilharzias and filariasis and on the distance of travel for health care for the treatment of HIV / AIDS or TB patients.

Everyone would agree that transport can have both a positive and a negative impact on poor people's health. The direct positive impacts of improved transport infrastructure and services on health are to increase access to health services, to enable better servicing of health outposts and to facilitate the movement of health extension workers. Yet the experience with the spread of HIV/AIDS has dramatically shown that improving access and mobility can also have strong negative impacts. Developing transport corridors for long distance goods transport for example, often results in increased sexual activity and the spread of HIV.

But there is an increasing realisation that we lack sufficient understanding on some of the critical issues.

There is, for instance, scant evidence about the impact of mobility on women's health status; little knowledge on how rural transport planning can design appropriate transport hubs that optimise positive health and mobility impacts; a dearth of disability and age-sensitive data; and a limited perspective on road safety and a lack of knowledge on safety issues relating to infrastructure and transport provision in low-income and rural areas.

More fundamentally, underlying this we simply do not know where the gaps in our knowledge are. It is these gaps that the Mobility and Health programme aims to identify and fill.

For more information please refer to Kate Moleworth's paper— 'Mobility and Health: the impact of transport provision on direct and indirect determinants of access to health services', available via www.mobilityandhealth.org



THE RESEARCH PROGRAMME

The Mobility and Health programme will carry out 24 case studies: 10 in Africa, and 7 each in Latin America and Asia. These case-studies will demonstrate the existing and potential links between mobility and health, especially in rural areas.

The programme uses the 'networked research methodology' (see over) to bring people from different contexts together to build a common analytical framework for their research, encouraging ownership not just of the research, but also of the process itself.

Following regional workshops in Mexico, Uganda and Indonesia and a 6-12 month research period, the programme will conclude with an international symposium to present the issues flowing out of the case studies and to develop outlines for continued networking, a 'toolkit', book and an advocacy programme.