

**Improving policy on children's mobility and access through
development of a participatory child-centred field
methodology/toolkit**

POR Project R8373

RESEARCH REPORT

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and
the child researchers from Ghana, India and South Africa

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BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this short one-year project was to contribute towards improved understanding and resolution of child mobility and access problems (which have far-reaching implications for education, health, gender equity and livelihoods) and to directly impact on policy formulation. The **principal objective** was to develop a participatory child-centred field methodology/tool kit specifically focused on investigating children's transport/mobility/access issues. This was to be tested in sample locations in three countries (Ghana, India, South Africa) and the results disseminated to policy-makers and practitioners.

The core research problem the project addresses is the mobility constraints faced by girl and boy children in accessing health, educational and other facilities in low income countries, the lack of direct information on how these constraints impact on children's current and future livelihood opportunities, and lack of guidelines on how to tackle them. Children and youths under the age of 18 have received remarkably little attention in transport and mobility studies and transport policy in low income countries, apart from limited work on road safety. This is an extremely important omission since over half the population of many such countries consists of children and young people in the age group 0-18. Improving mobility and access to facilities for this group is crucial if the Millennium Goals of Universal Primary Education, Promotion of Gender Equity and empowerment of Women, and Reduction of Child Mortality are to be achieved.

The project built directly on work in an earlier DFID-funded Crop Post-Harvest research project in Ghana (R7575) that suggested some broad hypotheses about children's mobility and access to transport and the impact of children's mobility constraints on livelihood opportunities which needed testing and, if correct addressing (Porter and Blaufuss 2002). We concluded that examination of children's access and mobility would be needed in diverse settings to explore and extend our tentative observations, to raise the visibility of the problem, and to develop policies to improve conditions. Most importantly, we were unlikely to be able to fully understand and address these issues without the prior development of appropriate **child-centred participatory methodologies** specifically tailored to examining mobility and access issues from children's own perspectives. As May observes (2001) although children's participation in development agendas has increased, there is still much tokenism where children's voices are concerned. In this short, one-year project we have consequently aimed to try to engage children themselves in developing a research methodology/toolkit, following the lead of our Indian NGO collaborator organisation, CWC, which already has substantial experience in innovative child-centred participatory methodologies.

METHODS

A detailed report of the methodologies utilised in this study is provided as a separate appendix. This section focuses on the methods by which the project collaborators

(including child participants) selected, developed and tested those methodologies. There were four central components to the process:

1. The desk literature review

The desk literature review (prepared at Durham University) confirmed our initial perception that remarkably little research has been published concerning the impact of mobility and transport access on children's lives (and rights) in low income countries. The review and our previous (R7575) study in Ghana enabled us to put together a list of potential research questions and research methods for discussion at the inception workshop.

One of the most interesting findings from the review concerned child-centred approaches. Most so-called 'child-centred' studies, we discovered, tended to deal with research by adults on children i.e. child-centred in terms of the object of research. Very few examples could be found of child-centred research where children themselves also conducted the research, in the model our CWC collaborators are promoting.

2. The inception workshop (Karnataka, India; October 2004)

This workshop took place so that the Ghanaian, South African, Indian and UK collaborators could review findings from the desk literature review together and explore the potential for applying the innovative child-centred approaches currently used by CWC, our Indian collaborators (in a child labour context), to transport/access studies. We needed to think through the approach with particular reference to a) children's access to education, b) children's access to health, c) children as transporters. The output of the workshop was to be a preliminary methodology/toolkit of techniques, flexible enough to cope with different socio-economic, cultural, environmental and institutional conditions, for testing in collaborator countries. We envisaged that it could incorporate both quantitative and qualitative data collection components.

Since the project aimed to be exploratory, innovative and highly collaborative in approach, the precise methodology for testing was to be developed by all the collaborators working together during this inception workshop. (This very open approach followed a model that a number of the research team members had pursued together previously in the DFID-supported 'Balancing the Load' project on gender issues in rural transport. In that case preliminary workshops had been of crucial importance in the development of appropriate methodologies.)

On the basis of the literature review, three documents were prepared for discussion at the workshop:

- A (pre-circulated) list of potential themes regarding children and transport
- A listing of possible tools for qualitative research with/by children.
- A set of possible survey questions

Relevant journal/conference papers were circulated to all collaborators.

CWC preparations for the workshop (held at their field station) included:

- Collation of documentation on their child-centred approach and work in India and Mongolia (which has been used to train around 250 Indian NGOs and was supported by SCF Norway).
- Invitations to children who would participate in the training programme from three Panchayats where CWC had not previously worked (in order to train the overseas participants in their approach working with new children, rather than children who were familiar with their methods).

Twenty-nine children participated, together with the project collaborators and seven additional CWC staff. The children (16 girls, 13 boys; ages 9-18), were from three neighbouring panchayats, where the children's organisation Bhima Sangha (the union by and for working children in Karnataka) had already developed five year plans that included some transport issues.

Over the course of the workshop the children were introduced by CWC facilitators to various data collection methodologies (see Methodology Report.) We observed the children refining and testing some of these methodologies through discussion groups and role play in the workshop (which covered ethics as well as methods) and subsequently through practical application in the field.

Field exercises took place at a peri-urban panchayat. The youngest group undertook observation, the middle group held group discussions with local children and the eldest group started accessibility mapping. The child researchers were highly successful in this preliminary trial, illustrating an ability to interact with and obtain relevant information from fellow child informants which few adults could probably so successfully achieve in such a short time period.

Potential application of the Indian experience of children's participation and child-centred approaches to Ghana and South Africa was discussed by the research team each day, prior to and following the sessions with the children (which were conducted in the local language, Cannada). This enabled Albert Abane and Mac Mashiri to review a range of possible approaches and potential collaborators with CWC staff.

3. In-country testing (October 2004 - April 2005)

Small *test studies* followed in India, Ghana and South Africa assess the toolkit's robustness in diverse conditions and make any fine-tuning required.

India

Facilitated by CWC field staff, the children who had participated in the workshop collected information in the three study panchayats (one remote rural, one rural, one peri-urban) using the same and additional methods. The initial methods employed during the inception workshop were extended to new areas within the three Panchayats and to new respondents:

- individual interview
- observation through route transects and other means
- accessibility mapping using flash cards with individual children of different categories (i.e. according to age, sex, working/non-working and other characteristics)

- focus groups with different categories (age, disabled, working and non-working children etc.)
- secondary information collection

The children then triangulated the information obtained from these methods with data collected using other methodologies, introduced following subsequent discussions between CWC and the children:

- a broad village PRA
- ranking exercises
- traffic count/weighing exercise

The number of children involved in developing the India testing phase increased substantially from those involved in the pilot, since other children wanted to join the project. They were supported by CWC field staff so that they could participate. In total, 144 children were involved in the Indian field testing phase, which extended over 4-months.

Finally, CWC held a 4-day workshop in Bangalore where the group work was consolidated into one report and role plays were conducted regarding how the communities reacted etc.

Ghana

Field testing in Ghana was far more limited in scope than in India, regarding numbers of children involved as researchers and participants, methods tested, types of field test location, and period over which field testing extended. Professor Abane had to start his field test of the child-centred approach from scratch, in that the concept of children researching children's issues is uncommon in Ghana and no NGO working directly with children in ways comparable to CWC's approach was identified locally. Fortunately, Professor Abane and his three participating colleagues all had substantial experience of working with children, since all trained initially as teachers. Two people from CWC provided additional support.

Professor Abane made the decision to limit the Ghana field test to a small number of local school children, because of the novelty of the approach they were attempting, and limitations of time and funds. This accorded with our conclusions at the inception workshop that small pilots with 10-15 children per site working on their own local transport/access issues would probably be the most that would be feasible in Ghana and South Africa.

A large number of schools in the Cape Coast Municipality and Asikuma-Odoben-Brakwa District of the Central Region were contacted and permission obtained from five schools for children to participate. Twelve children (seven boys and five girls) were selected (a mix of self-selection and school selection) and took part in the six-day training meeting/field testing. The children undertook an induction training, and then conducted their field testing in one peri-urban settlement.

In the Ghana field test it was only possible for the children to try out three of methods because of time constraints on children and staff (school examinations, teaching commitments, national elections in December 2004). These were:

- focus group discussion
- interviews with check list
- observation mapping

The three methods were selected by Professor Abane and his team as the most straightforward for application in the restricted time-frame available for the field testing.

South Africa

The field test in South Africa took place in a small, relatively remote, rural settlement located on an all-weather gravel road about 12 kms from the nearest health centre and 18 kms from Port St John's, Eastern Cape. Again, like the Ghana study, this field test was restricted by the novelty of the approach (at least in a transport context¹), and limitations of time and funds. Thirteen children (all from one school) were involved in preliminary field studies, and seven children in the three-day workshop which followed. The study was facilitated by the school's headmaster (who had attended the Ghana workshop to translate for the South African children) and CSIR Transportek staff.

Children were introduced to a number of possible research methods and made their own selection:

- observation mapping
- interviews with check list
- focus group discussions (girls and boys separately)

4. The review workshop, Cape Coast, Ghana, April 2005

The collaborators reconvened for the workshop in Cape Coast, Ghana, to review their experiences. Following CWC's proposal that child representatives who had participated in the research should be present at this workshop, to ensure that the project was fully child-centred, additional funding had been sought and approved by DFID so that they could attend. Consequently, we were joined by 19 child participants: four from India, three from South Africa and twelve from Ghana².

The 6-day workshop was largely facilitated by CWC, because of their expertise in working with children. During the workshop, we reviewed the process of doing the project, so that the children could see where their individual contributions fitted into the larger study. This included a review of the data collection methods and the children's perceptions of their value and ease/complexity of application. Each of the country-groups of children worked on and presented their consolidated findings. The children also reviewed potential solutions to the transport problems identified and people and organisations that would need to be approached in order to start to address these issues.

The children then presented their work and findings at a Stakeholder Meeting, opened by the Minister of Roads and Highways and well covered by local media. A final meeting between the adult collaborators reviewed our own perspectives of this pilot

¹ Child participation programmes are not entirely new in South Africa. The South African Human Rights Commission's Child Participation Programme, funded by UNICEF, is at the centre of a number of efforts to actively involve children (for instance the South African Law Commission which involved children in reviewing legislation affecting children in South Africa).

² Problems obtaining travel documents/visas for some of the children led to its postponement at short notice till early April.

study: field experiences, methodologies, data quality, gaps, overall strengths and weaknesses, dissemination plans and further work/phase 2³.

³ Because of the dynamics of the workshop with the inclusion of child participants, it was not possible to prepare a detailed research proposal(s) for a phase 2 project during the workshop as had been originally anticipated. Moreover, we agreed that further reflection was needed first on potential ways to take the work forward, given the diversity of country experiences.

FINDINGS

1. Findings regarding the child-centred approach

The child-centred approach showed substantial potential for understanding children's access and mobility problems in all three country contexts. Children were able to identify and research a range of problems among their peers, some of which would not be so readily apparent to adult researchers studying children's issues. Moreover, all the children involved reported their pleasure in gaining new understandings and skills. The Indian children have already received a letter of congratulation from their Local Government administration. The Ghanaian children from one school have since started another research project entirely on their own initiative, to consider school feeding arrangements.

However, child-centred studies are time and labour intensive. They may need substantial adult facilitation, particularly in the early stages where the children involved are unused to conducting their own studies. The Ghana pilot with 12 children, for instance, was supported by five university staff, plus two staff from CWC, working with the children full-time over six days. The time required for the programme can present difficulties not only for the facilitators, but for children who usually have to prioritise school and/or work tasks. Furthermore, careful preparation (consents from diverse stakeholders) and sensitisation is needed among stakeholders. This is especially time-consuming where the approach is to be newly employed. In South Africa such groundwork took many months before the pilot could commence.

Broader organisational structures also need to be in place if children are not merely to undertake their research but also get their concerns taken up and acted upon: i.e. if we are to avoid using children merely as information gatherers or information providers and empower them to look for solutions and implement them. From this perspective, children's participation should not be an activity or an end in itself but a process whereby children influence outcomes. The role of adults in this approach is to support children in their research and to influence policy at national levels. As CWC emphasise, it is important that children are not put on the 'front line', or at least not without adequate preparation.

In India, CWC has been successful in promoting organisational structures to support children's initiatives: however, it has taken CWC 25 years of advocacy to reach this point. In Ghana and South Africa, where there is no well-established structure of children's advocacy organisations within which to set the studies, the process has been facilitated in a very preliminary way by identifying stakeholders to help take the issues forward. This project has thus provided an opportunity to test the ground regarding child-centred approaches, but it will need substantial further work if the pilot is to be extended for testing in other locations in each country. Further testing will be necessary to ensure coverage of more diverse contexts. Adaptation of the toolkit to urban conditions and for research by non-literate children needs particular attention.

2. Child researchers findings about child mobility/access issues

a) India

The toolkit appendix provides detailed compilations of children's findings in the three study panchayats. Children engaged in a range of transport activities: many go school, they fetch water and firewood, they transport the harvest and collect rations from the shop, take milk to the market, accompany older people to the health centre and other locations. Children's transport responsibilities take up much time, and result in late attendance in school and tire them out, making it difficult for them to concentrate⁴.

They may face very different hazards from those perceived by adults, not least because of difference in physical height, but also sometimes because of their common position of powerlessness or other factors: e.g. they are less easily seen as they attempt to cross busy roads; may have more difficulty climbing over rocks or big roots of trees, jumping over gullies and fences, fording streams or walking on slippery bridges; small feet get caught in tree roots; bus conductors may start the bus before they have safely alighted; it is harder for young girls to avoid the unwelcome attentions of bus conductors or drunks as they return through the forest at twilight; fears of crossing the burial ground are widespread, leading to circuitous journeys etc.

b) Ghana

The Ghanaian children raised many similar issues, though there their work was limited to one peri-urban settlement: long walks to school, potholes and other obstacles along roads, open drains which children can fall in easily (especially when vehicles attempt to pass one another on narrow roads), drenching from passing vehicles in the rains, loud bus horns which startle children, lack of street lights, shortage of commercial vehicles, drivers molesting girls, traffic dangers at road crossings etc. Again, differences in young children's physical height and the relative powerlessness of children in the community were important factors which shaped the issues raised.

c) South Africa

In this relatively remote study village, the children's focus was also strongly towards daily transport issues (rather than more infrequent trips to distant locations). Load carrying was reported as a major issue: girls have to carry firewood for distances of up to 15 kms, because of local scarcity and associated conservation measures, and may walk up to two hours carrying groceries; boys and girls have to carry water from the communal taps (girls head load, boys may have access to wheelbarrows). Boys walk considerable distances herding cattle after school. Problems raised included head and back ache from load carrying, sore feet from running over the gravel roads herding cattle, and fear of meeting dangerous animals. Girls fear rape and sexual harassment especially after dark.

⁴ These issues were emphasised by many village children in Ghana (Porter and Blaufuss, 2002).

DISSEMINATION AND PROMOTION

Completed:

- Website established at www.dur.ac.uk/child.mobility includes the First Interim Report, the earlier Ghana research paper and links to collaborator institutions.
- Country collaborator discussions with local and state government staff in Ghana, South Africa and India.
- Three in-country Project Consultative Groups of relevant local/national stakeholders (for ongoing dissemination) established, consulted and kept informed of project progress. See toolkit appendix for membership details.
- India 4-day review meeting, Bangalore, March 2005 (included Consultative Group members and state media coverage)
- Ghana children's training meeting (February 2005), with media coverage.
- Stakeholder meeting day at project review workshop, Cape Coast, April 2005 with national media (newspaper, television, local radio) coverage.
- Session convened on Youth and Livelihood at the African Studies Association biennial conference, September 2004, University of London + paper presented: "Youth, mobility and rural livelihoods in sub-Saharan Africa".
- Basic information about the project in IFRTD's Forum News.

Planned:

- Indian and South African children (with CWC and CSIR respectively) to pursue conclusions of their studies with local government towards improvement of children's transport
- Indian children's own project book
- Short paper for IFRTD Forum News to NFGs etc.
- Id21 paper
- Dissemination to local, multinational and bilateral organisations by IFRTD secretariat and CWC.
- Joint publication for Development in Practice (in preparation)
- Presentation of papers at international conferences: "Emerging Issues in the Geographies of Children and Youth", Brunel University (June 2005); European Conference of African Studies, SOAS, London (July 2005). Possibly also Institute of British Geographers, Social Anthropology etc.

Proposal dissemination plan	How far achieved
In-country consultative groups	Established and operational
Dissemination of draft toolkit to in-country Consultative Group and NFGs.	Completed
Submission of paper to practitioner journal (based on final report to DFID)	In preparation

APPENDICES

- The methodology/toolkit (which covers the methodological detail of the research)
- Highlights summary

