

Policy briefing UN Open Working Group 11
Rural access and the Post-2015 development agenda

Need for rural access in all countries

About 3.3 billion people live in rural areas¹. Despite increasing urbanisation, rural populations are predicted to remain at this level for the next twenty years². Overall, about 30% of these people live more than two kilometres from any road³. However, isolation is heavily skewed and the proportion of un-connected communities is much higher in poorer countries. In several countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America, 60% of rural people still live more than two kilometres from an all-season road⁴. In some countries, including Ethiopia, Nepal and Papua New Guinea, there are many villages that are more than four hours walk from a road. When rural women, men and children do walk to the nearest road, they may still be many kilometres from the nearest market, hospital, school or economic opportunities. People depend on transport services to reach their destinations. In many rural situations such services are infrequent, expensive and unsafe (and sometimes non-existent)⁵⁶.

Rural isolation makes it extremely difficult to access medical facilities, education, employment and markets. Older persons and people with disabilities may be effectively imprisoned by the lack of roads and transport services. Ending rural isolation can be achieved by ensuring rural communities are linked to markets and services by appropriate infrastructure (rural roads, trails, bridges) that has adequate transport services. Rural people in low and middle income countries require passenger and freight services that are affordable, safe, accessible, convenient and appropriate.

Agriculture, forestry, livestock and fisheries are often central to rural economies, employment and income-generating opportunities. Rural markets are vital to access agricultural inputs and bring products to the urban supply chains. Adequate roads and transport services that allow essential inputs and the marketing of products are vital for rural economic growth, enhanced agricultural production and reduced food losses. Evidence from countries around the world indicates that food production increases and poverty is reduced when transport can reach village communities⁷.

Appropriate rural access is a key gender and equity issue. Women's timely access to maternal and peri-natal health care is crucial. Poor rural access disproportionately limits girls' access to education and women's access to markets, employment and entrepreneurial opportunities. Improved rural transport services increase the access of women, people with disabilities and disadvantaged groups and enhance their contributions to equitable economic development.

In richer countries, most rural communities are already connected to the road network (or waterways), but a key issue can be whether there are appropriate transport services to enable access to economic opportunities and essential services. There may be need for sustainable rural transport services to reduce car dependency and provide essential access for older persons and people with disability.

Rural access target and indicators within the proposed infrastructure goal (Focus area 8)

A post-2015 rural access target is extremely important in order to focus national and international attention on ways of improving access for rural communities. Implementation progress can be

¹ UN-DESA estimates the current rural population is 3.3 billion and will remain so until 2035. About 40% of the projected 8.3 billion world population will be rural in 2030. Source: <http://esa.un.org/unup/CD-ROM/Urban-Rural-Population.htm>

² Ibid.

³ World Bank rural access index data: <http://data.worldbank.org/data-catalog/rural-access-index>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Improving Rural Mobility. World Bank Technical Paper 525.

⁶ Rural transport services indicators: Final Report, August 2013. International Forum for Rural Transport and Development (IFRTD). Available at: http://www.ruraltransport.info/RTSi/resources/project_outputs.php

⁷ For example, see: <http://www.ppiaf.org/freighttoolkit/knowledge-map/rural/>

measured by indicators, but a specific target is crucial to galvanise action. A rural access target fits well within the Focus area 8 on economic growth, employment and infrastructure. This should be cross-referenced in the goals relating to sustainable agriculture and food security (Focus area 2) and eradicating poverty (Focus area 1) which include targets relating to access to markets (2d) and eradicating extreme poverty (1a). The rural access indicators will be valuable for measuring progress towards these targets.

The proposed target, based on the existing OWG wording of target 8g could be: “Develop sustainable infrastructure accessible to all, with attention to the needs of countries in special situations, and by 2030 provide access for 100% of rural populations to sustainable transport”⁸.

This rural access target can be measured straightforwardly by two process indicators, relating to the infrastructure and to the availability of sustainable transport services. These will be relevant and measurable in countries of all income levels, but their developmental importance will be greatest in lower and middle income countries. The first indicator is based on the rural access index developed by the World Bank that is an established IDA indicator that measures access in terms of infrastructure (motorable roads)⁹. The second indicator, which is also measurable, assesses the proportion of the rural population with access to transport services. While the target will be universal and relates to access for 100% of rural people, countries will be able to define appropriate access in the context of their own economic and geographic situations (a guiding framework will be available).

- Proportion of the rural population living within two kilometers of a road, motorable trail or other appropriate infrastructure providing all-year access (desired achievement: 100% achievement of national access targets, monitoring the poorest and remotest quintiles).
- Proportion of rural population living within 30 minutes’ walk of appropriate transport services (desired achievement: 100% achievement of national access targets, monitoring remotest quintile).

Rural access target/indicators within the proposed agriculture and food security goal

Given the importance of rural roads and means of transport for stimulating food production and marketing, and reducing food-chain losses, it is important to include rural transport at the target level within the agriculture and food security goal. The current target d) could be slightly modified to read: “By 2030 achieve access to adequate inputs, knowledge, productive resources, financial services, markets and sustainable transport for small farmers and fishers, with a particular focus on women and indigenous peoples”.

Specific mention of transport within this target will help national authorities and international agencies to plan measures to improve rural access. The two rural access process indicators proposed can be used to help measure and monitor the achievement of this target.

Measurement and monitoring

While the indicators are measurable, there will be need to develop and test standardised data collection and reporting mechanisms that will use appropriate survey techniques and GIS technologies. The development of national and international road safety statistics illustrates well how this might be achieved¹⁰. International stakeholders interested in the validation and monitoring of the indicators include the World Bank, ADB, DFID, GIZ and SLoCaT. AFCAP2 and ASCAP are major rural transport research programmes, funded by DFID, and due to start operations in July 2014, that have indicated interest in supporting the piloting of the rural access indicators.

⁸ It may be appropriate to add ‘and ICTs’. Access to energy, water and sanitation are covered in other focus areas.

⁹ World Bank: <http://go.worldbank.org/EVPZOQJ2I0>

¹⁰ The World Health Organisation worked with national authorities to agree international/national frameworks and consistent methodologies for capturing road accident data, calculating statistics, agglomerating results and reporting findings. See: http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/road_safety_status/2013/en/