

Editorial statement

The Transport and Communications Bulletin for Asia and the Pacific is a peer-reviewed journal published once a year by the Transport Division of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). The main objectives of the Bulletin are: to provide a medium for the sharing of knowledge, experience, ideas, policy options and information on the development of transport infrastructure and services in the Asia-Pacific region; to stimulate policy-oriented research; and to increase awareness of transport policy issues and responses. It is hoped that the Bulletin will help to widen and deepen debate on issues of interest and concern related to the transport sector.

Transport services are vital for facilitating the implementation of government policies. An organized public transport service system provides a mechanism for delivering social services, particularly health care and education, to the broader population, including those living in rural areas, which often tend to be poor and in most need of those services. Government policies in terms of budget allocation and fare-setting affect the quality of transport services. Transport services may be subsidized by the government in order to make them affordable to the poor, but this can result in a large fiscal burden on the government and inefficient or poor public transport services. Therefore, instead of generating social benefits and improving welfare, the overall impact would be a social burden on the population, which can constrain growth of other sectors and limit the provision of social services. The needs and capacity of society can affect the transport system. For example, growth of the tourism industry can facilitate progress in the transport service sector and demand for health and education services can lead to better public transport systems.

This Bulletin presents the state of transport services in selected countries, the circumstances that shaped the development of those transport service systems, and their impact on the communities that they serve. It consists of five studies:

- a. Transport, health services and budget allocation to address maternal mortality in rural Indonesia by Edriana Noerdin;
- b. Transport services in the Maldives – an unmet need for health service delivery by Maimoona Aboobakuru;
- c. Enhancing the sustainability and inclusiveness of Metro Manila's urban transportation systems: Proposed fare and policy reforms by Andra Charis Mijares, Madan B. Regmi and Tesuo Yai;
- d. A case study on establishing and running a community bus service in rural Sri Lanka by Ranjith de Silva; and
- e. Saving lives through rural ambulance services: experiences from Karnataka and Tamil Nadu states, India by A Xavier Raj.

The first two studies listed tackle the role of transport services in providing health care to rural communities, focusing on how the lack of an efficient public transport service has resulted in higher maternal deaths and ineffective health policies. The third study examines the government's fare-setting policy for rail-based transport service, and discusses how the aim for social acceptability has put a large fiscal burden on the government and led to impractical and conflicting outcomes for both rail-based and road-based transport services. The fourth study looks into a pilot project on community-driven transport services. It shows how a small rural community effectively established its own transport services. The last study presents how ambulance transport services resulted in more effective health services in two states in India.

In Noerdin's study on Indonesia, the high cost, low quality and often unreliable transport service in the rural areas adversely affect the performance of the health sector in Indonesia. As a result, the maternal mortality ratio (MMR) increases. Noerdin observes that women in rural areas have limited access to health services. Pregnant women are unable to go to health centers for check-ups and expectant mothers choose to give birth at home due to the very high cost of getting to the health centres and hospitals. Noerdin also examines select local governments' budget allocation for the health sector, which is set at 10% under the Health Law, to assess their political will in addressing MMR. She recommends pursuing an integrated approach to lower MMR through a higher budget allocation for health, upgrades in reproductive health service, and reliable and affordable transport services for pregnant women and mothers.

In the second study, Aboobakuru notes that despite progress in improving transport services in Maldives to meet the needs of the growing tourism sector, transportation remains poorly integrated with the other service sectors, particularly the health sector. The public transport service system is mostly comprised of disjointed privately owned sea vessels that travel based on passenger demand, and is poorly integrated with other service sectors. Aboobakuru highlights that increased demand for health services underscores the need for a better public transport service system. She points out that even though mobile outreach clinics are provided in the atolls, the general population prefers to go to hospitals in the capital Male because travel to and from the capital is easier than within the atolls. As a result, local health services are underutilized while health services in the capital are overburdened. Aboobakuru states that an organized public transport service system that facilitates transport between the islands, particularly among and within the atolls, is needed in order to enhance the effectiveness of health policies and further reduce the country's MMR.

Mijares, Regmi and Yai look into the fare-setting policy for rail-based transport in Metro Manila. Their study states that the pricing policy for the Light Rail Transit (LRT) 1 and 2, and the Metro Rail Transit (MRT) services are inefficient. The transport system imposes a large fiscal burden on the government and provides a poor quality service. The government's aim for social acceptability of rail transport prices through very low and highly subsidized fares has increased ridership and made the service more affordable to the poor. However, while carrying out this policy, it has ignored inter-modal equity and spatial equity. Rail-based transport competes with road-based transport, which put private operators at a disadvantage and rail services in the middle stations are constrained due to overcrowding. In order to promote an equitable transport system, the authors recommend that the government consider all modes of transport in setting transport fares, and regulate public transport operations, particularly buses, as well as private vehicles.

Meanwhile, de Silva examines how a pilot project on community-based transport service in Sri Lanka has shown how rural communities can set up and manage their own rural transport service. Community participation along with the personal commitment of the members of the board managing the bus company has sustained the operation of the service beyond the project implementation period. Due to the project, dilapidated roads were repaired to lower vehicle operating costs and new roads were constructed as demand for the service expanded. Lower transportation costs and shorter travel time led to better access to health services and education, and reduced prices of commodities in the communities. However, rural communities have had limited access to bank financing due to their limited technical capacity and the reporting requirements of banks. De Silva recommends that alternative forms of financing and support from non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations should also be made available to rural communities in order to promote the community-based transport system.

Raj tackles emergency-response services in India, focusing on ambulance transport services. The service is seen as key to improving access of rural communities, particularly members of the communities who are pregnant or children, to health care. Out-of-pocket spending for health is high (74%) in India and due to this, illnesses can push families into poverty. The government has launched universal access to basic and advanced health care in rural areas, which includes transport service to health facilities. Raj compares case studies of the service in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka in terms of efficiency, effectiveness and impact. He finds that rural areas in Karnataka use the service more than their counterparts in Tamil Nadu, while transport services provided in Tamil Nadu are more effective in terms of cost. They are also more efficient, given the lower share of its population in rural areas and its more extensive service network. However, both areas have been successful in improving their Millennium Development Goal-related health indicators. Raj notes that the use of professional ambulance services in emergency response systems in rural areas that employ advanced technology and management decision systems supports efforts to take a more holistic approach to health care.

Transport services should cater to the needs of the community and facilitate access to vital services, such as health and education. At the same time, setting up transport services should take into account the on the capacity of the government and the community that it serves. Transport pricing that result in large fiscal burdens does not lead to equitable services, but instead reflects inefficient policies, governments, therefore, the need to adopt policies that deliver quality transport service at a reasonable fiscal cost. Other alternatives, such as public-private partnerships or community-based systems, may also offer better solutions. Communities can work on establishing their own transport services in cases in which private investor participation and government capacity is low. Likewise,

support from the private sector and non-governmental organizations can increase government policy options and also facilitate the implementation of better transport service systems.

The Bulletin welcomes analytical articles on topics that are currently at the forefront, of transport development in the region as well as policy analysis and best practices. Articles should be based on original research and should have analytical depth. Empirically based, articles should emphasize policy implications emerging from the analysis. Book reviews are also welcome. See the inside back cover for guidelines on contributing articles.

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