

Highlights of the discussion

Why Don't We Do It on The Road?

The Value of Communication in a Rural Roads Project

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This brown bag case discussion is part of a how-to series that the DER Project Communication group regularly conducts for operations staff. Project leaders share practical strategies on how communication was effectively designed and used to engage stakeholders, change behavior, mitigate risks and criticisms from civil society - for better project results.

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Project Background: Cambodia Rural Roads Improvement Project (2010-2015)

- Rehabilitate 500 kms. of rural roads
- Provide reliable all-year road access to markets, employment centers and social services
- Covers 7 provinces located around the Tonle Sap Basin where a large proportion of rural poor live
- ADB provided a loan of US\$35 million of the US\$67 million total project cost

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- Complementing the loan, the Gender and Development Cooperation Fund provided US\$150 thousand for a 12-month technical assistance grant for a behavior change communication campaign

Communication Results of the Technical Assistance

- Campaign for contractors' behavior change resulted in 150,000 unskilled workdays created for women
- Increased demand from women for road jobs resulted in US\$250,000 in wages (at \$5/day)
- Government promotes women's participation and tracks sex-disaggregated data
- Success of communication campaign resulted in adaptation and expansion of "*Ready for Roads*" in succeeding rural roads project (covering 1,000 kms.)

"*Ready for Roads*" is a behavior change communication (BCC) intervention and the result of a technical assistance (TA) grant to complement the main loan, Cambodia Rural Roads Improvement Project (CRRIP).

To develop and implement "*Ready for Roads*," the Gender and Development Cooperation Fund provided US\$150 thousand for a 12-month grant to promote the following behavior changes:

- (1) For women to apply for jobs in road work;
- (2) For contractors to hire more women; and,
- (3) For MRD officials to promote equal access for women to road jobs.

This TA showcases how BCC interventions, when integrated well in a project, can help deliver gender and social equity targets, win the support of government and local stakeholders, and ultimately, improve project outcomes and sustain gains beyond the project's life.

The Communication Question:

Why the need for communication?

Road construction was an opportunity to help spur the local economy through providing jobs. Most stakeholders such as government officials and road contractors, however, assumed that the jobs would naturally go to men because as a Construction Site Supervisor explained it, "Women are not very fast. They don't have enough strength like men. They can only do housework such as sweeping and cleaning, watch the kids and cook."

The project's Gender Action Plan (GAP) showed that it was possible to achieve its objectives of expanding the social benefits of road construction and maintenance to poor women if contractors would hire them and if there was demand from the women themselves. This need called for a behavior change communication (BCC) strategy to position road construction as a concrete opportunity to reduce household poverty and promote gender inclusivity.

Communication planning and implementation: How did they do it?

Identification of communication needs and recruitment of communication consultants

At the onset, the project identified the need to have communication strategies for road safety and the prevention of HIV/AIDS. Through the GAP, a different communication need was identified to increase the demand for women to do rural road construction and maintenance.

Initial review missions showed that women were not getting construction work because of the following behavioral constraints:

- (1) they were not aware of the job opportunities;
- (2) contractors did not want to hire women; and
- (3) government officials thought women didn't want to go into road construction work.

The scope of the project's communication needs necessitated the hiring of development communication consultants with expertise in behavior change and gender. The project team, with DER's assistance, screened and hired two communication entities – a national NGO, CARE Cambodia, and a private communication firm, 17 Triggers.

CARE was selected by single source selection (SSS) as guided ADB's guidelines on use of consultants. Its extensive experience working with Khmer communities, especially in the gender field, and its use of participatory development approaches were among the considerations for its recruitment. 17 Triggers was selected for its expertise in behavior change communication planning and campaigns, and social marketing.

Since the deliverables of both firms were dependent on each other's performance and they worked with the same group of stakeholders in the same project sites, ADB and the project team ensured that the contractors' workplans were closely coordinated, activities were timed and responsibilities were clearly delineated. CARE focused on capacity building for increasing the capacity of government officials and contractors to mainstream gender while 17 Triggers worked on developing and disseminating advocacy and communication materials.

Conduct of behavior research and targeting of specific target audiences

One of the critical aspects of CARE and 17 Triggers' collaboration was the conduct of a common baseline research centered on identifying the behavioral barriers that prevent the recruitment of women for road construction jobs. The results of the research formed the bases for designing the BCC strategy as well as the training framework.

The research verified the initial observations from the review missions and identified the key behavioral barriers of specific target audiences:

- Contractors were the biggest obstacle to the recruitment of women for construction jobs. They believed that women can only do housework and did not have the strength nor speed for road construction
- MRD officials assumed the women did not like road construction jobs since these were traditionally held by men
- Rural women, on the other hand, were eager for this kind of work except they did not have access to information about available job opportunities

Using appropriate communication channels and field testing materials

To address the key behavioral barriers of MRD officials, contractors, and the local women themselves, the most appropriate communication channels were identified for each of the audiences.

Direct capacity building was used to promote the desired behavior change among MRD officials. Maximizing Cambodia's gender policies in the workplace, CARE conducted a series of training for MRD officials and staff to enforce those policies by promoting equal access for women to road jobs. The training also emphasized the long term goal of implementing and monitoring gender policies in all development projects beyond the current loan.

CARE and 17 Triggers produced several job aids to complement the training:

- a set of training manuals
- a training video to enable MRD to train other government officials involved in infrastructure projects

One crucial insight from the baseline research was how contractors and women believed in the strong role that women hold in housework and agriculture. A key strategy developed from this insight was to establish the similarities between these traditional jobs and road construction work.

To do this, CARE trained contractors on-the-job to promote women’s access to road construction work by pointing at specifically at how the women’s skills in agriculture and housework can be successfully applied to construction jobs. To complement the training and manuals, 17 Triggers also produced the following communication paraphernalia and provided convenient materials for use on-site during actual recruitment:

- training video
- handy job aids (i.e., site managers’ utility cards, etc.) to help recruit and match women applicants to appropriate jobs
- to reinforce their behavior changes, certificates were awarded to those who have successfully recruited and provided safe working sites for women

“If you can clean, you can do road work,” was one of the messages in Khmer that 17 Triggers developed to pique the interest of local women for construction jobs and let them know that such work was available.



Initial designs of the planned communication paraphernalia showed the message with actual photos of women doing traditional house and agricultural work while behind them were “shadows” or “silhouettes” depicting the similarity of their expertise with a particular construction skill.

Adapting the universal yellow “men-at-work” construction sign, 17 Triggers also developed a graphic image of a woman doing road work using a background of either pink, blue or yellow. The

materials were meant to convince women to apply for road jobs through village and commune authorities.



The copy, design and graphic were pretested among local women in the project coverage sites who were targeted for construction work. Prototype posters, stickers and job information leaflets were distributed in designated community centers to determine how

women perceived the information and whether the materials caught their attention. The pretest results showed how the communication paraphernalia could be improved to compel the target audience in doing the desired behavior change (i.e., apply for jobs) and the most appropriate places where they will receive the most attention from the women.

- While women understood the copy outright (“*If you can clean, you can do road work*”), they perceived the “shadows” or “silhouettes” behind them as “ghosts” and failed to grasp the connection between the photograph of them doing house and agricultural work with what the shadows depicted
 - The “shadows” / “silhouettes” were removed and in their place, thought bubbles show straightforward pictures of the featured women doing road work
 - Pretest results emphasized that for the local Khmer women in the project sites, more linear, clear-cut messages and graphics were preferred over abstract treatment



- Big posters showing silhouettes of women doing construction work were placed on the side of houses located in community centers did not receive much attention
 - Household distribution of leaflets and placement of communication paraphernalia in strategic areas in communities where women converged



- The graphic image of the “women-at-work” were too curvy for Khmer women
 - The graphic was adjusted to show a woman wearing construction clothes
- Yellow was accepted as a universal color for the stickers and clothing to depict construction work
- Information contained in the paraphernalia showing where women could ask about job opportunities and apply, were well received. Designated authorities in the village commune were the most trusted sources of information about available jobs and application procedures.
- Women preferred to wear long sleeved, yellow construction work shirts to stave off heat from the sun and remain visible; visor caps and other marketing paraphernalia that they could also use at work.

Socio-political considerations

Among the considerations that CARE and 17 Triggers handled was whether the spouses, partners, male in-laws were also key audiences whose behaviors may pose difficulties to the women’s application and recruitment. The baseline research showed that the women’s families

were supportive of the chance for extra income from the road work with the added advantage of having the construction site near their villages.

Religious barriers did not factor in as an impediment to women working in road construction. The areas around the Tonle Sap Basin were predominantly Muslim but the key stakeholders did not consider this as an issue.

Lessons for future ADB road projects

- The project had various communication needs and early identification could have integrated all the strategies for a well-coordinated, stronger campaign

At the onset, communication strategies were already in place for road safety and HIV/AIDS prevention. The BCC strategy to increase demand for women to do road construction jobs, however, came later to implement the Gender Action Plan.

- The project's Gender Plan had high targets to complement outcomes but since it had no budget, resources had to be leveraged for implementation

Most plans will not be implemented if there are no budget allocations. Investing in proactive communication is more cost-effective in the long term.

- The scope of the project's communication needs required the hiring of professional communication consultants, and had these been identified at the concept stage, specialists could have been included in the PPTA with coordinated deliverables

While there were already gender and safeguards consultants on board, the project needed behavior change communication specialists. Early identification of the consultancy needs can help integrate communication activities in gender and due diligence processes for more synchronized outputs.