

HVT/ PIARC WEBINAR – SUMMARY NOTES

The Impact of COVID-19 on Women in Transport in Low-Income Countries

15th May 2020

Topic

The impact of social distancing policies on the transport sector in low-income countries presents different challenges to those faced in developed economies; the differences in impact of such policies on men and women is also challenging. As economies close in response to COVID-19, women face significant risks to their health and livelihoods. In the transport sector, where women are already significantly under-represented, they face precarious and vulnerable employment situations that any COVID-19-related economic crisis will accentuate, in a differentiated way to that facing men in the sector.

Any post-COVID-19 response must recognise these gender differences, involve both men and women in its development and be equitable and inclusive in its impact. This webinar draws on current experiences from experts around the world working in this field and will draw together thoughts on key issues and useful initiatives in place or planned to address them.

Summary

Jeff Turner, Moderator

It is clear that we may have to consider that the effect of COVID-19 on the transport sector may last considerably longer than we first imagined.

In the UK, the Transport Minister suggests that it is citizen's "civic duty" to avoid using public transport as the "stay at home" measures are eased, in order to maintain physical distancing and reduce resurgence of the virus. This message and the impact on attitudes to using public transport may have negative consequences for a long time.

As a result, we need to look at economic measures to support workers and operators providing public transport services, in order that there are public transport services to come back to. **Prof. Gina Porter** highlighted the very serious negative impact that loss of income from restrictions on public transport operations is having on households and workers across the whole of the informal sector, including those engaged in informal trading as part of the urban food supply and those working in transport. Whilst many low-income countries are providing food aid to the most vulnerable, a substantial percentage of women make their livelihoods in the informal sector, and they are not being served by such emergency aid. Consideration needs to be given to the design and delivery of financial social protection measures for these large percentages of the population, so that their livelihoods can be maintained, and they can continue to be users or workers in the transport system.

The example from **Naomi Mwaura** at Flone Initiative of the innovative pilot they are implementing providing cash transfers to women transport workers engaged in the informal transport sector highlights the need for experiments, at least, that could be developed to move forward in this direction.

The evidence from **Dr Fatima Adamu**, of the efforts by government agencies, at enforcing regulations and developing some formalisation of the informal transport operators in Nigeria pointed to an interesting future direction. She reported that authorities were developing an interest in doing something that they historically been uninterested in, i.e. maintaining some

form of order by policing urban public transport. She also reported that such enforcement was seen to enhance women's perception of safety of the system. Maybe this points to a positive direction for a future where there may be greater efforts and engagement with formalising informal public transport in many low-income countries. This could provide substantial benefits to all users, especially women, by improving perceptions of safety and quality and by rebuilding confidence in public transport.

Finally, **Anna Wildt-Persson** and **Christos Xenophontos** highlighted the need to think about who is developing and implementing any future direction. They highlighted the importance of transport institutions that will be at the forefront of the recovery phase, and their need to incorporate gender mainstreaming in their practice. Women and men need to be equally involved in the development of the future. **Claire Clarke** referenced ILO Resolution 205, which called on all agencies across the world, when responding to an emergency and its recovery, to ensure that planning and implementation includes:

- Gender-disaggregated data;
- Gender impact assessments;
- Gender-responsive planning;
- Representation in decision-making;
- Existing women's rights reinforced; and
- Unions included as key stakeholders.

This may be a reasonable objective to focus on, in order to develop a more inclusive and gender-equitable transport system for the future.

Other questions arising for consideration/ research:

Can we use space offered by post-COVID recovery as an opportunity to formalise employment in passenger transport? What would formalisation mean for achieving gender equality, overcoming gender occupational segregation, and increasing the number of women employed?

Are there any specific strategies for job creation within the transport sector with a gender perspective?

Making transport gender neutral needs to be addressed through the design rather than being an afterthought.

Will COVID-19 continue to impact the behaviour of both passengers and transport operators post-COVID, or is it possible that such behaviour will slow or cease once COVID is past? What can be done to seize this opportunity to make changes to stop the slip back to the 'business as usual' approach?

Are there any parallels, lessons and solutions to draw on from past experiences dealing with HIV, Zika, Ebola?

Some Latin American cities (Colombia, Panamá) have put gender segregation measures in place, such as assigning specific days when men can go out for essential activities, and days when women can go out (i.e. on odd-numbered days, men can leave the house to seek out essentials, on even-numbered days, it's the women's turn). It would be interesting to study the risks and results of such measures.