

SEACAP Briefing Paper

Overview

Sustainable and affordable rural access is a necessary precondition for expanding social and economic opportunities for rural women and men, thereby enhancing pro-poor growth and poverty alleviation efforts.

SEACAP is a poverty-targeted transport initiative within the Global Transport Knowledge Partnership¹ (gTKP) framework. It is aimed at improving sustainable access of people in rural communities to health, education, employment and trade opportunities, with projects currently in Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos PDR, and Sri Lanka.

The programme identifies and supports the uptake of low cost, proven solutions for rural access. Focused on the needs of poor women and men, it aims to maximise the use of LOCAL resources, including labour, materials, enterprise and most importantly ingenuity.

SEACAP provides funding for rural access applied research, disseminating information to stakeholders and supporting the mainstream application of better techniques and approaches.

This programme has now expanded to twenty-four projects. The individual projects demonstrate good practice responses to local demands and in combination create a comprehensive multi-level approach with high expectation of the results being MAINSTREAMED into national practice.

SEACAP is primarily funded by DFID having close links with country governments, WB, ADB, and the EU. It actively seeks to work with other development partners, by providing practical solutions to access problems. DFID's support to the rural access sector is especially important when considering the vast amounts that are invested in the sector, but very few, other organizations are investing in the scientific and engineering research necessary to ensure that these capital investments are yielding optimum returns. Indeed experience on the ground indicates that they are not.

SEACAP in Vietnam

The SEACAP program in Vietnam is the most advanced of the SEACAP country programs. The experience from Vietnam serves as an important basis for modeling initiatives and replication in other countries. It is worth looking into this program in detail.

Strategic Partnerships: SEACAP has been integrated into DFID's support for the Ministry of Transport's (MoT) National Rural Transport Program² (NRTP) with capital assistance from the World Bank. Under the guidance of a steering committee composed of key authorities and stakeholders, this strategic partnership has demonstrated how relatively modest, but well targeted and conceived grant assistance can influence and add great value to major national investment programs. In this case the improvements that SEACAP has stimulated to the NRTP are most remarkable.

¹ Information can be found at - <http://www.gtkp.com/>

² Information can be found at - <http://www.mt.gov.vn/>

Getting the Fundamentals Right: SEACAP has manifested a radically new approach to the NRTP. SEACAP has demonstrated that a number of the key fundamental assumptions made in the NRTP design were simply wrong, and would lead to poor or even failed results. For example, SEACAP research has demonstrated that the use of naturally occurring, unimproved gravel³ as the surfacing material for all of the rural roads to be built under the NRTP would be a mistake. Indeed SEACAP has proven that the use of gravel as a surfacing material is appropriate in less than 30% of the situations.

To someone not involved in the NRTP this may seem like hardly an important finding, however, this has led to the avoidance of wasting scores of millions of borrowed dollars. The impact is of real significance to Vietnam's rural development program.

From this research, guidelines for the use of gravel as a surfacing material have been elaborated. These guidelines have international application and are increasingly referenced⁴. The challenge for SEACAP will be to coordinate with PIARC⁵ and gTKP the dissemination and mainstreaming of these guidelines to the stakeholders locally and internationally. This is true of all of the work that SEACAP is carrying out.

However, it is not enough to demonstrate what will not work. SEACAP has provided evidence based research to demonstrate appropriate technical solutions. Alternate⁶ paving technologies, have been trailed and although in some cases these technologies are centuries or even millennia old, they offer good solutions to today's rural access problems. Through the trials the method of selecting the optimum technology for a rural road has been introduced to the NRTP. The selection process takes into account the road environment, the road task and the locally available materials. This is a major step towards enhancing affordability and sustainability.

Maintenance: All roads need to be maintained - FOREVER. If they are built well, the maintenance burden will be minimized and will be feasible, but if they are built poorly the maintenance burden will be impossible. After pointing the way towards optimum technology for the construction of the rural roads, SEACAP has assisted the MoT to develop comprehensive, state of the art, customized, rural road maintenance training materials and to carry out the training⁷ of over 11,000 communes in 43 provinces. This training is essential to prepare the staff to carry out their maintenance responsibilities.

To compliment this technical work SEACAP supported the development of two sensitization videos for the general public, aimed at increasing the support for rural access investments. These videos were broadcast on national television in Vietnam and were well received. Other countries wish to imitate this initiative.

Strategic direction: DFID has provided resources to the MoT to update the Rural Transport STRATEGY. The outcomes of the SEACAP program in Vietnam have now been embedded in this strategy, ensuring that the impacts continue to work for the development program in Vietnam for many years to come.

³ SEACAP 4, document can be downloaded from - http://portal.mt.gov.vn:8089/ruraltransport/rrsr/filearea/Documents/1_111_SEACAP4_Final_Intech_TRL

⁴ Henning, T., Kadar, P., Bennet, C.R., Surfacing Alternatives for Unsealed Rural Roads, Transport Note No. TRN-33, World Bank, May 2006.

⁵ PIARC is the World Road Association, information can be found at - <http://www.piarc.org/en/>

⁶ Information can be found at - <http://www.mt.gov.vn/ruraltransport/rrsr/>

⁷ Information can be found at - <http://www.vietnamtraining.net/indexE.htm>

In for the Long-term: In particular the work done by SEACAP on appropriate rural road technologies needs to be continued into the future. The effort will evolve from demonstrating and trialing alternative technologies towards monitoring and measuring impacts over a period of time sufficient to provide valid scientific evidence of performance. This data is essential to validate and to finesse the various models and guidelines that are being developed now. Without this long-term monitoring the conclusions drawn from the present work will be notably incomplete.

The End Game: The work of SEACAP in Vietnam will be accomplished when the government curtails demand for SEACAP support. This is expected to occur once it has effectively mainstreamed the SEACAP outcomes into its national rural transport program. The mainstreaming will include integrating the standards and specifications, and the economic and social modeling for rural roads and access into the national standards and national guidelines.

Reducing Poverty: The above discussion may seem to be a far reach from actually helping poor, rural, at times isolated, women and men to rise out of poverty. However, it is well established that good access, and economic and social development, are directly related. At the local level, the approach demanded of SEACAP by the local stakeholders will directly improve access through the provision of dependable, affordable, year round access. Further the injection of local resources into the construction and maintenance of the rural roads will provide increased benefits through demand for local services and materials, which in turn will increase local economic activity and consequently employment opportunities. At the macro level the rural and the provincial economies will achieve better economic integration. This will ensure better return on the investments made in access and will enable the repayment of the loans. In so doing resources will be freed up for continuously better social and economic investments. This will surely accelerate over all growth and development, as well as reduce poverty.

SEACAP in Cambodia

SEACAP has been providing assistance to the Ministry of Rural Development (MRD) in Cambodia since its inception. SEACAP has carried out road paving trials and researched the short-term performance⁸ of these trials. As is the case in Vietnam, the trial work has triggered investors to begin to change the technical approach to the provision of rural roads. The WB, the ADB and most recently the KfW are now integrating the outcomes of this SEACAP research into their projects.

SEACAP has investigated a number of key issues pertaining to rural access in Cambodia⁹, including the problem of vehicle overloading, safety, and importantly the elaboration of the first Rural Road Strategy¹⁰. As with Vietnam the outcomes of SEACAP initiatives are integrated into this strategy. SEACAP has assisted the MRD to elaborate interim standards for rural roads that are a great improvement upon what the MRD had previously.

The MRD, PIARC and SEACAP collaborated to hold what was to date the largest rural transport conference¹¹, focused on rural access, at the end of 2005, in Cambodia.

⁸ SEACAP 8 - Final Report pending.

⁹ Information can be found at - <http://www.cnctp.info/library.asp>

¹⁰ Download the document at - <http://www.cnctp.info/StrategicPlan-RR-July-2007.htm>

¹¹ Information can be found at - <http://www.cnctp.info/281105.htm>

Further SEACAP has assisted the BBC Earth Report¹² to produce a documentary on rural roads and access that aired over BBC World in early 2006.

SEACAP provided support for the formation of the Cambodian National Community of Transport Professionals (CNCTP). The CNCTP consists of key stakeholders in the development of rural transport in Cambodia. It has established an important website containing valuable information and materials for those interested in rural access in Cambodia. It is also now integrating its organization with the International Forum for Rural Transport Development (IFRTD)¹³, as such it is expected to add professionalism and continuity to the rural transport program in Cambodia.

Cambodia is at a much different stage and pace of development than Vietnam. The rural access program will require considerable support for the foreseeable future. SEACAP is seen by the MRD and the concerned stakeholders as essential to the development of this program.

SEACAP in Laos

SEACAP is working in Laos in partnership with the WB and the ADB to demonstrate rural road paving options, develop local resource based solutions to slope and embankment stability and developing appropriate local resource standards and specifications for rural roads. The program has benefited from the work carried out in Vietnam and Cambodia. Opportunities for collaboration at the community level are being explored with AUSAID.

SEACAP in Sri Lanka

A new program in Sri Lanka is in the final stages of formulation. This program will partner with the relevant local authorities, the UNOPS, EU, WB, ILO, as well as local NGOs and communities. The program has been formulated based upon the experience from Vietnam and as such is modeled on an established framework, which should improve the comparability of outcomes for scientific purposes.

Demand for SEACAP Elsewhere

The demand for SEACAP to expand to other countries in the region is high. Afghanistan and Bhutan have formally requested SEACAP inputs to their rural access programs. Others have expressed informal interest.

Key Issues

Dissemination: The outcomes of SEACAP need to be more thoroughly disseminated.

Mainstreaming: Mainstreaming outcomes is the critical stage in the success of SEACAP, and it is the stage where many prior programs have failed. SEACAP needs to remain focused on this objective.

Long-term commitment: Evidence research as the name suggests requires evidence. This evidence can only be accrued over time, particularly in the case of the performance and socio-economic impacts of rural roads and access.

International Good Practice Guidelines: Developing "good" international practice guidelines for the development and management of rural access are essential for improving the performance and for the professionalizing of the sector. The cumulative SEACAP experience will be vital to this objective.

¹² Information can be found at - http://www.handsonTV.info/series7/05_taking_off_reports/report4.html

¹³ IFRTD information can be found at - <http://www.ifrtd.gn.apc.org/new/index.htm>