

Id21 insights: proposed highlights summary for dissemination

## **Children's transport and mobility: towards a child-centred methodology/toolkit**

Children and youths under the age of 18 have received remarkably little attention in transport and mobility studies and transport policy in low income countries, apart from limited work on road safety. This is an extremely important omission, given that over half the population of many low income countries consists of children and young people. Improving mobility and access to health and education facilities for both girl and boy children has massive implications for their subsequent livelihood potential. It is crucial to many of the Millennium Goals.

Research collaborators from the University of Durham, U.K.; The Concerned for Working Children (CWC), Bangalore, India; the University of Cape Coast, Ghana; CSIR Transportek, Tshwane, South Africa; and the International Forum for Rural Transport and Development (IFRTD), working with child researchers, have produced a pilot Methodology/Toolkit on children's mobility and transport. This not only focuses on child mobility and access problems, but aims to support children who want to be part of the structure and processes for their participation and empowerment.

As May observes (2001), although children's participation in development agendas has increased, there is still much tokenism where children's voices are concerned. Drawing substantially on CWC's experience in promoting innovative child-centred participatory methodologies (mostly in a children's rights context), our child research collaborators (approximated equal numbers of boys and girls) have piloted the transport methodology in sample rural and peri-urban locations in three countries (Ghana, India, South Africa). The study was most extensive in India, where 144 child researchers were involved in three different panchayats in Karnataka (one remote rural, one accessible rural, one peri-urban). In Ghana, the pilot was limited to 12 children in one peri-urban settlement near Cape Coast in Central Region and in South Africa to 13 children in one remote rural settlement in the Eastern Cape Province, because of the relative novelty of the approach in these countries, and limitations of time and funds.

From our preliminary field tests in India, Ghana and South Africa we conclude:

- The child-centred approach shows substantial potential in all three country contexts.
- Children between 9 and 18 years of age were able to collect and analyse a wide range of data on transport and mobility issues using diverse methods, including in-depth interviews, focus groups, observation (transect) mapping, traffic counts, questionnaire surveys, etc.
- Using the methodologies they developed, children were able to identify a range of problems affecting them and their peers. They may face very different hazards from those perceived by adults, not least because of difference in physical growth and development, but also sometimes because of their common position of powerlessness or other factors: e.g. they are less easily seen as they attempt to cross busy roads; they may have more difficulty

climbing over rocks or big roots of trees, jumping over gullies and fences, fording streams or walking on slippery bridges; small feet get caught in tree roots; bus conductors may start the bus before they have safely alighted; it is harder for young girls to avoid the unwelcome attentions of bus conductors or drunks as they return through the forest at twilight etc.

- All the children involved in the project reported that they enjoyed their involvement: they had gained new understandings and skills as a result of their participation and wanted to conduct further research into issues impacting on children. The Indian children had already received a letter from their local Gran Panchayat (Local Government administration) congratulating them on their excellent work. The Ghanaian children from one school have since formed their own organisation and started another research project entirely on their own initiative, to consider school feeding arrangements.
- This project provided an opportunity to test the ground regarding child-centred approaches to studying transport and mobility. We focussed on a very limited number of rural and peri-urban sites. Further testing in all three countries will be necessary to ensure coverage of more diverse contexts (agro-ecological, socio-economic and cultural). Adaptation of the toolkit to urban conditions and for research by non-literate children is possible, for instance, but will need further attention.
- Examination of children's access and mobility is needed in diverse settings, not just to explore and extend our tentative observations about children's transport issues, or to promote child-centred approaches, but to raise the visibility of the problem, and to develop policies and institutional support to improve conditions. The methodology can help sensitise transport professionals and policy makers to the specific mobility needs of children so that they can be addressed.
- There is a very positive impact on children if they can do their own research towards solving their problems and influencing policies.
- Children learn extremely valuable research and information management skills.

The following points, which are broadly relevant to any type of child-centred study, also need to be taken into consideration in future planning of child-centred research:

- Child-centred studies are time and labour intensive. They may need substantial adult facilitation, particularly in the early stages where the children involved are unused to conducting their own studies. The Ghana pilot with 12 children, for instance, was supported by five university staff, facilitated by two staff from CWC, working with the children full-time over a six days training period. The time required for the programme can present difficulties for children who usually have to prioritise school and/or work tasks.
- Careful preparation (consents from diverse stakeholders) and sensitisation among stakeholders is essential. This is especially time-consuming where the approach is to be newly employed. In our South Africa study such groundwork took months before the pilot could commence.
- Broader organisational structures need to be in place if children are not to be merely information gatherers or information providers but rather, to be empowered to look for solutions and implement them. From this perspective (strongly promoted by CWC), children's participation should not be an activity or an end in itself but a process whereby children influence outcomes:

information only becomes power if it is used. The role of adults in this approach is to support children in their research and to influence policy at national levels. In India, CWC has been successful in promoting organisational structures to support children's initiatives: their strategy is just 7 months old in the 3 Panchayats where the study was conducted, which suggests there is considerable potential in any area, provided the adult facilitators have the expertise and skills (as shown by achievements in the 5-day pilot work in Ghana). In our Ghana and South Africa pilots, where there was no well-established structure of children's advocacy organisations within which to set the studies, the process had to be facilitated in a very preliminary way by identifying stakeholders to help take the issues forward.

### **Contributors:**

**Child researchers:** *Ghana:* Basil Amidu-Sefordzi, Anthony Breb, Priscilla Nunoo, Celia Mensah, Samuel Ansah, Frimpong Andy David, Baku Ben, Gloria Aidoo, Ibrahim Quansah, Kate Mensah, Sebastian Osumanu, Patience Amissah.

*India:* Hambadi-Mandadi panchayat: Pradeep shetty; Vittal; Vajresh; Rajendra; Raghavendra; Jyothi; Deepa; Indira; Sudeep; Ajith; Mithun; Jayprakash; Harish; Ganesh; Adarsh; Prashanth; Sukadeep; Kavya; Vinaya; Usha; Shrikala; Akshatha; Vijetha; Chaitra; Pradeepa; Ramya; Swathi; Rashmi; Vani; Deepa; Prema; Abhishek; Bharath; Ganesh; Adarsh; Nagesh; Shivaprasad; Shubhakara; Vittala; Pradeep; Naveen; Ashwath; Prasanna; Nagaraja; Gururaj; Chathur; Chithra; Sunitha; Prathima; Saroja; Kalpana; Vinutha. Ajri Panchayat: Inira; Anitha; Padamavathi; Sushmitha; Suma; Bhavyashree; Shymala; Asha; Jyothi; Ravindra; Umesh; Subramanya; Suresh; Sudhir; Shrinivas; Mahesh; Shashwath; Anith.A; Divya; Vanith; Sujatha; Suchethra; Sugandi; Sunith; Mamatha; Surendra; Ramesh; Sharad; Ranjeth; Harish; Suresh; Sandeep; Pratibha; Anusha; Suresh Poojari; Chandra; Lokesh; Bharth; Ramachandra; Nagaraj; Deepika; K.Chethan; Susma; Nalini; Deepika; Shashank; Shridevi; Rukmini; Chandrakala; Vishnu; Inila; Ashvath; Krishna; Surendra; Usha; Sujatha Shetty; Revathi; Sujatha. Gujjadi Panchayat: Nagarathna; Lakshmi; Sangitha; Suma; Nagesh; Kiran; Arun; Prashanth; Prasad; Swetha; Asha; Ashwini; Vishalakshi; Revathi; Saroja; Nagesh; Neelakanta; Srikanth; Raju; Girish; Vasanth; Manjula; Ragu; Pradeep; Shrikanth; Ajith; Annappa; Prakash; Prakash; Nagaraj; Annappa; Supriya; Pallavi.

*South Africa:* Aviwe Khohliso, Avela Magula, Duma Bingwa, Thobela Mtambeki, Yonela Khohliso, Cikizwa Petshana, Promise Biata, Sindsisiwe Mpambeki, Abonga Mpambeki, Nokulunga Vara, Siambulele Macabuko, Sisiso Mtambeki, Asacela Petsana

**Adult researchers:** Gina Porter, Kate Hampshire, P.J. Lolichen, Nandana Reddy, Albert Abane, Mac Mashiri, Denise Buiten, Rotsana Zukulu, Priyanthi Fernando,

### **Source:**

Participatory child-centred field methodology/tool kit: [www.dur.ac.uk/child.mobility](http://www.dur.ac.uk/child.mobility)

### **Further information:**

Gina Porter  
Department of Anthropology  
University of Durham  
43, Old Elvet  
Durham DH1 3HN  
UK

Tel: 44 (0) 191 33 46181

Fax: 44 (0) 191 33 46101

Email: [r.e.porter@durham.ac.uk](mailto:r.e.porter@durham.ac.uk)

.

**Funded by:**

DFID (POR Project R8373)

**Key words:**

Children, transport, mobility, access, child-centred, participatory, methodology, toolkit

**Regions:**

Ghana, India, South Africa

**Other links:**

[www.workingchild.org](http://www.workingchild.org)