

Travelling Together: Improving access for people with disability through inclusive road development in rural and urban Papua New Guinea

Despite the fact that an estimated 15% of the population, or 1 million people, are living with a disability in PNG, people with disabilities are often excluded from community development activities. Road infrastructure is a recognised approach to poverty reduction in developing countries, through improving community access to essential services, social networks and economic opportunities. Community participation in identifying needs and improving design is crucial for sustainable, effective and efficient road infrastructure development, which should connect people and places appropriately, and benefit the poorest groups. People with disability are typically among the poorest and most vulnerable in any society, but there is very little evidence about the most effective ways to involve them in road infrastructure planning.

What is this research about?

The 'Travelling Together' research project is investigating:

- Positive and negative impacts of roads on the lives of people with disability;
- How people with disability are currently involved in road and transport planning;
- The recommended approaches for engaging people with disability in road consultations, planning and management.



Photo: A wheelchair user attempts to access a bridge footpath constructed without ramps.

Who is involved in the research project?

This is a participatory research project involving a wide range of community members and organisations. People with disabilities and Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs) have played an important role in the design of the project, data collection and analysis and sharing the findings. The project has also involved families, carers and communities of people with disability, disability service providers, national and provincial level government planners and contractors involved in building roads in the rural and urban areas of PNG, and donors.

Four participatory, inclusive methods have been used for data collection within the project:

- **Interviews** with local road decision-makers, including engineers and managers from government agencies responsible for road design and/or implementation;
- **Group discussions** with people with disability;
- **'Moveabouts'** or access audits of short sections of road by people with disability;
- Photo elicitation and **poster making** showing liked and disliked aspects of the roads studied.

The research partners

'Travelling Together' is coordinated by the CBM Australia – Nossal Institute Partnership for Disability Inclusive Development and the Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning (University of Melbourne) in partnership with the PNG Assembly for Disabled Persons, Cardno and Divine Word University. It is funded by the Australian Government Aid Program through an Australian Development Research Awards (ADRA) grant, and is a three-year project being implemented in 2010-2013.

A person with a disability

is a person with 'a long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment, which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others'.

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006)

Research findings

In all locations studied, respondents agreed that while roads improved their access to services, inaccessible road and transport infrastructure still severely limited their ability to travel freely and safely. Roads were planned for the needs of vehicles, not pedestrians.

Key barriers to accessing infrastructure identified were:

- No marked crossing points, even in busy areas such as schools or markets;
- No footpaths or narrow, steep, poorly maintained or overgrown footpaths, forcing people to travel on roads and navigate fast traffic;
- Narrow bridges with poor pedestrian access e.g. overgrown footpaths without ramps;
- Poor drainage including open drains, and potholed and bumpy roads;
- No marked bus stops and lack of facilities such as seats and shade in bus stop areas;
- Lack of public and driver awareness of the access needs of people with disability as pedestrians and road users.



Photo: Data collectors interview people with hearing impairments about their road usage.

Facilitators of access to roads included well-maintained roads and footpaths; safe paths for people with disability to reach specific locations; and assistance from other road users in crossing and navigating roads. There was no evidence of road decision-makers consulting with people with disability regarding their road and transport usage. The decision-makers interviewed were largely unaware of the needs of people with disability as road users; however they were interested to learn more once they were made aware of the issue.

How will this research be used?

The research findings are being used as a basis for developing guidelines for road and transport infrastructure planners and implementers, on how to include people with disability in their activities and better understand their needs as road users. People with disability and DPOs will also be able to use the research findings in future advocacy activities, and to provide advice to the government and other organisations on disability inclusion.

Next steps

In 2012-13 the project is:

- Working with road and transport decision-makers and developing tools to assist them to better understand the needs of and consult with people with disability.
- Holding workshops with DPOs and people with disability in Papua New Guinea to support their use and promotion of tools to guide practice, and advocacy for improved roads and road infrastructure.
- Disseminating the research findings and tools to government, development agencies, managing contractors, donors and others involved in road and transport planning and construction.

For more information please contact:

Ipul Powaseu

Research Officer PNG Assembly of Disabled Persons

Phone +675 721 53 047

Email: pngadp@gmail.com

Natalie Stephens

Program Officer Nossal Institute for Global Health

Phone: +61 3 90354729

Email: natalies@unimelb.edu.au

Project Website:

http://ni.unimelb.edu.au/travelling_together_disability_inclusive_road_development_in_png

Associate Professor Carolyn Whitzman

Principal Investigator

Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning

University of Melbourne

Phone: +61 3 8344 8723

Email: whitzman@unimelb.edu.au