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# **A rapid assessment of rural transport services in Southern Province, Cameroon**

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rapid assessment of rural transport services



## 1- Summary

Rural Transport Services (RTS) are essential for poverty alleviation, both for its equity and growth aspects. The present report, carried out in the rural area of the Southern Province of Cameroon, is a part of a study realized in three other countries (Burkina Faso, Tanzania and Zambia) on the request of the SSATP in the framework of its new approach focused on integrated transport. The main objective of this study is to develop (and test) a methodology for the rapid assessment of the provision of RTS in developing countries, for further rapid and low cost assessments of RTS in other countries. The assignment has been done by undertaking the medium range distance of between 5 to 200 km, using semi-structured interviews, observations at all the different stages and stakeholders.

Rural transport in the Southern province of Cameroon involves mainly surface transportation. Despite the presence of many rivers, water transportation remains non practicable. Since several years, the policy and regulatory framework is undergoing important reforms (involving mainly the funding for infrastructures), but many of its items remain poorly implemented at the regional and local levels. Among the main factors influencing rural transport services, poor road condition is the most important. Around 10% of the provincial road network is tarred and, 25% of this total road network is said to be in good condition by the Public Work authorities; villages are located along roads. Transport activity is seasonal event during the year, the month and the week. This leads to a specific demand for both goods and persons transportation, and vehicles are then very highly technically modified to fit with the existing demand. The transportation price is said to be expensive (25 to 50% of the annual revenue of families). Motorized vehicles are quasi omnipresent in all the different spokes, and four wheel vehicles are mainly found in market spokes. IMTs exist also, and involve mainly motorbikes and to some extent bicycles. If the purchasing prices of motorbikes is getting cheaper (USD 600 – 700), the one of bicycles remain very high (USD 200 – the price of a second hand motorbike), compared to the rural peoples revenue. The main trends of the transport situation concern mainly the presence of motorbikes that, since some few years, are replacing mini buses that disappeared from the road network because of its poor condition. Based on our calculations, the transportation activity is financially profitable. But some operators (mainly rural taxis transporters) said to have very little financial profit from that activity, and they consider it as a social activity since it helps in serving remote rural areas. This idea is also shared by some transport authorities. In the other hand, the operators are doing a reasonable job, but they lack qualifications to carry out their activity in the best way. This social aspect is also mentioned by the authorities to justify the non respect of issues such as safety and security in transportation. The existence of barriers (gendarmes, police, safety, local council.) at the entrance and exit of towns and some villages for the checking purpose is a good initiative. But according to operators, these checking points are mostly considered as ‘paying points’ (they say to pay bribes for an amount that is 100 to 200% the total fuel consumption). Women operating a mode of transport are scarce, and marginalized people concern mainly handicapped people. They sometimes benefit some favours from the operators. The existing transport services are mainly found in regional and market towns, where motorized vehicles are mostly found in bus or motorbike stations. Operators act differently from one division to another. They are well organized in one of the four divisions (Dja et Lobo), with different kind of enriching examples of associations, consequently with a relatively better way of functioning. In the other localities, they mainly function as a tribal association in public bus stations.

Ways of valorising the economical potentials of the Southern Province rural area of Cameroon may be by improving road conditions. But, for it to be achieved in a sustainable manner, sensitizing the rural people and the local communities on their role and place in the process would be of great importance. Other aspects concern the good governance issues, the reinforcement of the policy and regulatory framework at the regional and local level, and the capacity building of all the operators.

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