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EVALUATION OF INFRASTRUCTURAL INTERVENTIONS FOR RURAL POVERTY ALLEVIATION



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Foreword

By mid-1997, the Asian and Pacific region had experienced two or more decades of rapid economic growth. In some cases this growth had led to improvements in the standard of living of the less well-off members of society. In general, however, poverty remained widespread. With the onset of the financial and economic recession in East and South-East Asia, the situation deteriorated and major setbacks were experienced.

In most countries of the region, the vast majority of the population lives in rural areas. It is in these areas where the incidence of poverty is highest and the standard of living is lowest. Lack of access to social and welfare services, such as health, drinking water, sanitation and education, and to employment, markets and other economic opportunities is a major contributing factor to poverty and low standards of living.

In the light of the above, ESCAP, with financial assistance from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), executed a pilot project on participatory planning of rural infrastructure in two zones of Oudomxai Province, Lao People's Democratic Republic. The project was designed to fit within and cooperate closely with the Integrated Rural Accessibility Project (IRAP) of the International Labour Organization (ILO). The ESCAP component comprised a number of elements, including implementation of a participatory approach to identifying and planning infrastructure interventions; direct transport or transport saving interventions; technical assistance in the areas of agriculture, watershed management, micro-enterprises, and savings and credit schemes; the development of guidelines for policy makers on participatory approaches to rural infrastructure development; and the development of training-of-trainers manual for using participatory approaches in rural infrastructure development.

The project benefited from a management structure which included a number of "cluster" countries. Through the sharing of experience, these countries made considerable contributions to and learned from the activities undertaken during the project.

The Asian Institute of Transport Development (AITD) contributed directly to the successful implementation of the project. Its contributions included undertaking a study on evaluation of infrastructural interventions for rural poverty alleviation and hosting the Regional Seminar-cum-Cluster Country Meeting on Participatory Planning of Rural Infrastructure, held from 5 to 8 May 1998 at New Delhi. ESCAP is pleased, therefore, to bring out this publication jointly with AITD. I am particularly encouraged by the high

level of cooperation between ESCAP and AITD in the spirit of the Memorandum of Understanding between our organizations.

It is clear that many development projects and even integrated development projects in rural and underdeveloped areas, guided by traditional economic cost-benefit analyses and top-down approaches, are not achieving their desired results. It is being increasingly recognized that projects and programmes need to encompass both social and institutional dimensions which demand the participation of all members of society, i.e. all concerned stakeholders. The programme of work of the ESCAP secretariat is designed to embrace this wider perspective and we look forward to continuing our assistance to the members and associate members of the Commission in these areas.

Adrianus Mooy
Executive Secretary
ESCAP

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