



# The Bicycle Debates

*Bicycles are low cost, easy to repair and generally reliable. They provide a good transport solution in rural areas where public transportation is scarce, motorised private transport is expensive, and roads are often poor or non-existent. This much the transport sector seems to have consensus on. However, when we start to explore the ways in which bicycles can be made affordable and accessible to more poor people, that consensus falls away to be replaced by questions.*

*Where should bikes come from; should they be manufactured locally to stimulate the local economy or imported cheaply from abroad? What is a good government policy on bicycles; taxing bicycle imports, or providing low cost bicycles (eg. Shova Kalula in South Africa)? Bicycle projects often give recycled bicycles from developed nations to poor rural communities in developing nations, sometimes for free, what are the implications of this?*

*In this issue of Forum News we are dipping into some of these debates, bringing you some differing perspectives and experiences from across the globe, and hopefully provoking some critical thought on future strategies. What is an enabling policy environment to stimulate bicycle use? How can we sustain local bicycle industries and at the same time keep the cost to the consumer low? How do we facilitate a culture of cycling? What are the priorities of different stakeholders – users, artisans, traders, importers, governments and development agencies, and what are the trade-offs for the decisions that we make?*



McKay Savage, Hand in Hand

*Training rural women in bicycle repair, Tamil Nadu, India*

understood that bikes do help. Some African countries regard bikes as recreational toys and charge as much as a 100% tariff.

By David Peckham

Excerpt from 'Sustaining Bicycles as Desirable Rural Transport'

Full article: [www.ifrtd.org/new/issues/op\\_bicycles4.php](http://www.ifrtd.org/new/issues/op_bicycles4.php)

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## Working within the Market System

The Village Bicycle Project has been working in Ghana to make bicycles more affordable since 1999. We focus in three specific areas; supplying bicycles and parts, bike tools, and providing repair education. In rural areas repair training is coupled with discounted bikes (half-price), effectively making bicycles available to poor communities while empowering them to take better care of their lives.

It is significant that we work with the market system. We don't give things away. 100% charity disrupts markets, which runs counter to values of sustainability. Gifting promotes a culture of dependence, devalues the goods and services, and is a magnet for corruption and deceit. Things that are freely given are freely wasted. The approach of the Village Bicycle Project lowers the bar of access to bicycles, giving access to a wider spectrum of the hard working but disadvantaged poor. At the risk of sounding a bit Darwinian, if we gave bikes away to Society's losers, what would that do for the general impression of bikes? Instead by making bikes more affordable, they become more associated with success and psychologically more attractive.

It is important that Ghana removed import duties on bikes in the mid 1990s. The government was serious about helping the poor and

## Understanding Ownership

Promoting ownership of a bicycle is not just about keeping the chain oiled.

As part of our operations we sell some bikes at subsidised prices to community-based entrepreneurs, but with bikes for community healthcare volunteers we don't ask for payment. Nowadays to address ownership we spend several hours in discussion with every beneficiary in an effort to make clear the link between their volunteer work and the resource they are receiving. Also to address problems and concerns they may have relating to their new asset.

In a recent discussion on ownership strategies a colleague chastised me for not charging volunteers for their bikes. "But" I protested, "If the UN decided that my work was worthwhile and bought me a 4x4 to help me do it better, I'd just be grateful for the recognition. It would make me more motivated to do my work, because I wouldn't get stuck in the sand

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on the way to villages anymore, and I'd feel a sense of pride about being awarded such a useful piece of equipment". Apart from that I argued, it is men who control most household income, and it would be men who the mostly female volunteers would go to for the cash to buy the bike. It would then be the men who view the asset as belonging to them.

By Michael Linke, Ben Bikes Namibia

Excerpt from 'So Who Can Ride a Bicycle'

Full article: [www.ifrtd.org/new/issues/op\\_bicycles3.php](http://www.ifrtd.org/new/issues/op_bicycles3.php)

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## Online Resources:

Pan African Bicycle Information Network (PABIN) [www.ibike.org/pabin](http://www.ibike.org/pabin)

Bicycle Sponsorship Project and Workshop (BSPW) [www.bspw.org](http://www.bspw.org)

Afribike NGO [www.afribike.org](http://www.afribike.org)

Shova Kalula Bicycle Project, South Africa <http://tinyurl.com/shovakalula>

International Bicycle Fund [www.ibike.org](http://www.ibike.org)

Village Bicycle Project, Ghana [www.villagebicycleproject.org](http://www.villagebicycleproject.org)

'Girl Power' Ride a Bike Workshop Report [www.villagebicycleproject.org](http://www.villagebicycleproject.org)

Bicycle Empowerment Network (Ben Bikes) [www.benbikes.org.za/](http://www.benbikes.org.za/)

# Are Cheap Imports Challenging the Local Economy?

In two contrasting articles we hear from Namiz Musafer in Sri Lanka where the local bicycle repair and assembly industry has suffered at the expense of affordability to the consumer. Meanwhile, Jeffrey Maganya reports on how Kenya's zero tax on bicycle imports has leveraged an entirely new local industry, the boda boda.

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## The Rise and Rise of Bicycle use in Kenya

One of the key outcomes of the elimination of import duty on bicycles in Kenya in 2002 has been the growth of bicycle taxis as a mode of public transport in rural and peri-urban areas.

The confluence of high youth employment and growth in high-density peri-urban settlements lacking in reliable public transport services led to a phenomenal growth in bicycle taxis known as "boda bodas". According to the UNDP (2006) the high rate of unemployment in Kenya pushed many to consider working in the bicycle taxi sector as an enterprise opportunity with low entry barriers. While this growth has been spontaneous, it was primarily enabled by wider government policy on the use of bicycles.

Attempts to manufacture bicycles locally in Kenya were abandoned in the 1980's due to the small size of the market and a lack of comparative advantage for component manufacture with China or India. Bicycles are imported in parts and assembled locally. In 2002 the Kenyan government announced the elimination of bicycle import duties and the years that followed saw a huge growth in the number of imported bicycles. According to the Kenyan government statistical abstract for 2007: 386,503 bicycles were imported in 2002, rising to 446,638 in 2003 and reaching a high of 722,418 in 2004. The increase between 2002 and 2005 was 87%. In the same period motor vehicle imports, which saw no change in the tax regime, saw a 28% increase in imports.

The growth of the boda boda business has been phenomenal in medium size Kenyan cities such as Kisumu, Nakuru and Kakamega. According to the UNDP in 2000 there were 5,000 bicycle taxis in Kisumu and since then the Kisumu Boda Boda association reports over 20,000 boda bodas in the city.

Even as the bicycle taxi trade has improved there have been some disincentives. Many local councils see them as a source of revenue through local taxes. The Nakuru Municipal council collects about US\$5 per month from each operator as a levy. Bicycles also need infrastructure, including tracks and parking lots, which are not prioritised by the local authorities. Accident prevention, crime management and harmonisation with other modes of transport are other key areas of policy intervention.

In 2007, as a result of pressure from the east African regional trading partners to harmonise taxes, the Kenyan government introduced a 10% import duty on bicycles. Although there are no current figures to show how this has affected bicycle imports, the retail price of bicycles has increased from approximately \$48 to \$71. The effect on the boda boda business is yet to be seen.

Despite the subsequent adjustment of this policy decision in 2007, cycling is now firmly entrenched as a flexible and competitive means of personal and passenger transportation.

## The Changing Face of Sri Lanka's Cycle Industry

In rural Sri Lanka where private transport is expensive, there is poor connectivity to main roads and a lack of affordable public transport services, the bicycle seems an obvious choice for isolated communities.

Until Sri Lanka adopted an open economic policy in 1977 there was widespread use of bicycles and a strong bicycle manufacturing industry. Since then there has been an influx of foreign vehicles (motor cycles, tuk tuks and cars and vans) that has impacted upon the local bicycle manufacturing and repair industry. The recent trend for businessmen to import used bicycles from developed countries is further challenging the bicycle assembly industry. Today the local value addition to a bicycle is marginal compared to the situation in the mid 1970s, yet bicycle use continues to rise with 150,000 to 200,000 bicycles per annum added to the roads.

In Sri Lanka a bicycle is the most accessible multi-functional vehicle for poor families. On average every 2 in 3 households in rural areas owns a bicycle, with an estimated 3.5 million cycles used throughout the country, and these bicycle users are serviced by approximately 3500 bicycle repair shops. As the initial investment to establish a repair shop is low, they are common even in rural areas, however low social recognition and low profits do not encourage young people to embark on a career in bicycle repair. For example none of Sri Lanka's vocational or technical institutions offer recognised courses in this discipline. Newcomers must learn on the job from senior technicians (sometimes repeating their mistakes) rather than following structured training to enhance their knowledge and skills.

The use of bicycles for recreation, leisure activities, exercise and races by an affluent urban crowd has re-awakened the interest in bicycles in rural areas. Locally manufactured 'Standard Bicycles' are fast being replaced by imported used bicycles with multi-gears, sold with only a marginal price increase to a brand new Standard Bicycle.

Visiting a small town market in Sri Lanka you can observe all types of bicycle extensions. Bicycles with trailers and extended frames are used to increase the load carrying capacity for passengers or goods. Luggage carriers are used at the front and back of the bicycle in order to carry commercial goods on a small scale eg. bread, cigarettes, fish, vegetables. Fuel wood and water are also carried by bicycle, often for long distances. Some people use the bicycle handles to carry or sell goods such as king coconuts, while the main frame bar is used for goods such as milk and newspapers. Special brackets can be added to the rear of the bicycle to carry for example 4-6 standard liquid petroleum gas cylinders (12.5g gas).

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# Snapshots of a Two Wheeled Rural Economy

## Traders

The Southern province of Cameroon reveals a good example of the role of the bicycle in the economic development of rural areas. Here along rural roads settlers carry goods for trading activities on the luggage panniers or handlebars of bicycles.

A cobbler met at the Sangmelima to Oveng junction, 25km from Oveng on an un-tarred road, uses his bicycle to visit villages with his service. His skilled repair service is important in rural areas where generally people cannot afford to buy new shoes. Rather than throw them away shoes are repaired for from 10 cents to US \$1 to wear another day. The cobbler travels from village to village on his bicycle throughout the week.

Another trader originally from the North West part of Cameroon travels from village to village by bicycle. He trades non-perishable goods (sandals, kitchen items) and can travel up to 80km per day. His bicycle is a highly modified Chinese model.

## Toy or Domestic Carrier

Wooden bicycles are a particular characteristic of Cameroon's Southern Province. They have all the essential parts of a bicycle – wheels, frame, seat, luggage carrier, handlebars; but without a transmission system. Made with local wood, layers of rubber are added to the wooden cycle wheel to both limit deterioration and to reduce shock transmission from the ground. A flexible stick attached to the frame close to the wheels is used as a brake. Once pushed down it uses friction to reduce the speed of the bicycle.

Wooden bicycles are primarily a children's plaything, but also prove very useful to the household. Villagers report that it satisfies their

transport needs by carrying people and freight from one village to another with a load capacity of up to 4 persons and up to 200kg of freight.

## A Social Indicator

In most areas of rural Cameroon a bicycle is the exclusive domain of men. To own one is a privilege and a status symbol. Its use is usually closely linked to a specific rural commercial activity. For example young dealers called 'Batcham' in Bamiboutous District, Western Cameroon, use bicycles as the main means of transporting their goods to big rural markets.

Women are restricted from using bicycles for socio-cultural reasons. However there is an exception in Santchou, Western Cameroon, where the bicycle is a unique object in Bamileke culture. Every household owns at least one bike and everyone, men, women and children, has access to it. In Santchou, men and women learn to ride bicycles as children, and those that do not know how to cycle are teased and called 'foreigners'.

The bicycle is an important social indicator. Its acquisition is relatively cheap but its ownership, the type you own and the way you maintain it is important.

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# Bicycles for Social Inclusion

The use of bicycles in Brazil's urban areas has recently increased. Whether this is due to economic issues, to continuous traffic jams or to the high rate of environmental pollution, cyclists are nevertheless taking up the space to which they are entitled. However, a lack of adequate road infrastructure for bicycles makes cyclists feel insecure, especially children, and this quick, enjoyable and autonomous way of going to school is often abandoned due to the risks faced by schoolchildren when bike-riding.

The current road system privileges private car transportation and, therefore, hinders or even impedes other transportation means. To understand this better two studies were carried out in Florianópolis.

In the first research, "Rotas seguras para a escola" (Safe routes to school), the researchers Giselle Noceti Ammon Xavier and Milton Carlos Della Giustina, of Universidade Estadual de Santa Catarina (UDESC), together with the NGO Association of Cyclists of Grande Florianópolis (CIACICLO), carried out studies on the transportation conditions of schoolchildren from six public schools located along state roads in different neighborhoods in Florianópolis.

In the second research "Mobilidade ciclística: um modal de inclusão sócio-espacial" ("Bicycle Transportation: a form of social-spatial inclusion"), carried out by Roberta Raquel. The purpose was to know about the conditions for the use of bicycles by students in public schools located along the state road in the Rio Tavares neighborhood, as a possibility for social and spatial inclusion.

Both studies, interviewed students and reached very similar conclusions: around 80% of the students have bicycles, but less than 15% of them use it to make the home-school route; this infrequent use is mainly due to the lack of adequate infrastructure and fear of traffic.

As public schools are attended by students from low-income families, providing safe structures for bicycle-riding would have a direct impact on the family economy by reducing the demand for public transportation.

Moreover, it would indirectly contribute to the family economy because pedaling is an important physical exercise to keep fit.

The studies, backed by users' perspectives, highlight the fact that sooner or later in life, citizens see that their autonomous transportation is difficult and are prone to seek the use of motor vehicles in the future, saturating traffic even more. The fact that the studies have been carried out in sub-urban areas, leads the researchers to believe that the situation will worsen as urban areas increase.

Even now some transportation planners do not consider bicycles as a good transportation choice for their towns. However, bicycles are an option to break off from individualist logic, providing an extremely effective transportation means in short and medium stretches and reducing the pressure on town roads.

In this sense, the above-mentioned studies served as important social analysis instruments on the use of bicycles for transportation. They show that bike transportation favors transportation of low-income people. Nevertheless, the lack of infrastructure reduces the potential demand from a large proportion of the population, highlighting that public authorities are not carrying out their function.

Social and spatial inclusion, considers both the issue of people's access to the city in its entirety: work, entertainment, studies, etc, and the issue of people's freedom to do as they like. Where the family income is used for basic expenses such as housing and food, lack of transportation is a factor that contributes to social exclusion and segregation. It is within this context that bicycles come up as a transportation possibility, as a cheap and low cost maintenance vehicle for the whole family.

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## News and Events

### Roads as Social Spaces

In African countries the accidents which occur on roads and railway lines often have nothing to do with transport itself. Rather they are related to the social and commercial activities that the local population carries out on, or next to, transport facilities. In rural areas of sub-Saharan Africa non-transport activities that are carried out on, or next to, the road/railway are easily apparent eg. herds of cattle, goats or pigs grazing next to the road and presenting a safety hazard.

A new document in the *Global Transport Series* by Felicien Amakpe describes in words and pictures some of the 'social uses' of transport corridors in Benin, West Africa.

To download a free copy:  
[www.lulu.com/content/2032437](http://www.lulu.com/content/2032437)

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### World Bank Publishes New Transport Strategy

How will the World Bank reconcile its responsibilities to combat climate change and poverty? What will that mean for a development model in which economic growth is the route to poverty reduction and international trade the route to growth? These were just some of the questions asked at a special public event in London on May 22nd 2008 to launch the newly published 10 year Transport Strategy for the World Bank. Speakers included Mark Juhel (Transport Sector Manager, World Bank), Brendan Martin (Public World) and IFRTD's Marinke van Riet.

IFRTD's address focused on mainstreaming gender in the new Transport Strategy. The response entitled *'The real rural energy crisis is women's time'* stated that to date the majority of agricultural goods continue to be head-loaded, predominantly by women, who make up the majority of agricultural smallholders and transporters. It is estimated that 75% of 0.5 million maternal deaths could be prevented if women had timely access to health services and skilled birth attendance. The address concluded with practical recommendations for gender mainstreaming.

Download World Bank Transport Strategy:  
<http://tinyurl.com/wbts2008>

Download 'Balancing the Load' IFRTD panel address:  
<http://tinyurl.com/btl2008>

### Micro Credit Programme Addresses Rural Women's Transport Burden

The Bicycle Micro Credit Project organised by Cycling out of Poverty, NCDO and I-CE. Is carrying out programmes in Uganda, Kenya, Burkina Faso and Ghana.

The objective of the project is to reduce poverty by improving access to bicycles for poor African women in rural areas. Transportation by bicycle consumes less time and energy than transport by foot, and the time and energy saved can be allocated to other livelihood activities such as:

- Generating more income by transporting more products.
- Diversifying income by taking up other income generating activities (becoming less dependent on one source of income and less vulnerable to shocks).
- Improving access to facilities such as health and educational facilities.

The micro credit project targets women who do not have the financial means to buy a bicycle from a shop and pay for it at once. Women who have a vision on how a bicycle can help them to move out of poverty can buy a bicycle and pay it back in installments.

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### Bicycles and Motorbikes Spreading the HIV message in Uganda

The International HIV/AIDS Alliance, an alliance that supports community action on AIDS in developing countries, has been handing out bicycles, motorcycles and cheques in ceremonies across Uganda as part of an initiative to improve the uptake of HIV services in the country.

The ceremonies mark the growth of a programme by Alliance Uganda to expand the role of networks of people living with HIV in the delivery of prevention, treatment and care services. Through the programme, the Alliance and NAFOPHANU (the National Forum for People living with HIV/AIDS in Uganda) have been training people living with HIV to become network support agents. These agents work to link providers of HIV prevention, treatment, care and support services with people living with HIV and their families.

The new bicycles, motorcycles and grants will allow the network support agents to build on this work, which includes supporting people with their HIV treatment, and working to address social and psychological barriers to services – for example working with people and their families to demystify what treatment involves, and working directly with service providers.

Source: International HIV/AIDS Alliance

More information:  
<http://tinyurl.com/hivbicycles>

### About Us:

The IFRTD is a global network of individuals and organisations working towards improved access and mobility for the rural poor. It provides a framework for collaboration, information sharing, debate and advocacy that bridges traditional geographic and institutional boundaries.

Membership of the IFRTD is free. All members receive Forum News and any other publications that are made available to the network. In over 20 countries autonomous networks that subscribe to the vision of the international network have become affiliated to the IFRTD as National Forum Groups (NFGs).

The IFRTD is facilitated by a small, decentralised Secretariat based in the UK, Cameroon, Kenya, Peru and Sri Lanka. Please contact the IFRTD Secretariat as follows:

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