

## **Improving the Image of Bicycles and Bicycle Use In Uganda: – (A Case Of The Bicycle Sponsorship Project And Workshop (BSPW)).**

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### **Brief History Of Bicycles In Uganda.**

Introduced in Uganda in 1903 by the colonial government, and later to the Buganda Courts as presents, bicycles were originally a mark of prestige providing a better transport option at the courts, replacing the “**Emiruno**” or stretcher group used to transport Chiefs / Kings. Later they were acquired by the trading community and became an important tool in the transportation of cash crops like coffee, cotton and tobacco.

With the introduction of the car, the bicycle was rapidly abandoned by the privileged classes and rapidly dropped in status and its ownership has since been left to the low -income groups especially in rural areas. Kings, Chiefs and the trading community provided role models in society, thus reinforced the belief that “**the bicycle is a tool for the poor**”, an attitude that has then been handed down from generation to generation.

### **Constraints to bicycle use:**

There are three major constraints to the greater usage of bicycles and these include; the terrain, attitude and infrastructure. Therefore, bicycles are more popular in flat landscapes than in hilly areas, in rural than in urban. The conditions of roads over which bicycles are ridden influences the size of the load that can be carried. If the condition of a road is poor over a long distance, the bicycle tends to become simply a ‘load carrier’ than a means of personal transport. (*John Howe, February 1994*)

For reasons of prestige, citizens of higher incomes decline to use NMT, this state of affairs also explains the fact that NMT users in rural environments are happier with their means of transport, even proud of owning a bicycle, whereas the same people in urban areas stated that they felt inferior (*Heyen Perschon 1996, p.55*).

It is also influenced by the design, with the prominent bicycle designs being for males dominated put the female user at a disadvantage (*Farough Olinga, 2001*).

The fleet of bicycles as estimated from the Ugandan National Household Survey, records the percentage of households owning a bicycle in different regions of the country as 1.7 million (*Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2001*).

### **Introduction to FABIO/ BSPW**

The First African Bicycle Information Office (FABIO) is a capacity building and lobby arm of the Bicycle Sponsorship Project and Workshop (BSPW) a non-governmental organization promoting non – motorized mobility especially the bicycle in Uganda and elsewhere in the world. It was started in 1990 as a community based organization and it has grown through different stages. The main objective was to push for the bicycle popularization and due recognition in Uganda.

It focused itself to issues of accessibility and affordability of the bicycle by the rural poor people particularly the women who make up the majority.

### **Uganda's Transport Policy Structure:**

Transport and traffic are a responsibility of the Ministry of Works, Housing and Communications. Transport has its own Minister of State who also heads the Directorate of Engineering, Directorate of Transport & Communications with other related structures below.

However, the legislative body of Uganda which is Parliament, consisting of about 350 representatives, All policy decisions of the government have to be approved by Parliament, after the discussion of the different parliamentary sectoral committees. The committee on Works, Transport and Communications is responsible for policies as presented by the line Ministry.

So far, no clear decisions have been made by Parliament to improve low-cost mobility, although the committee says it regards cycling an important issue for rural areas, this has not been translated into policies and plans.

Besides, the importance for (semi)-urban areas is not mentioned. (*Erwin Bos, Frank Mulder, Freek Foster, January 2003*)

### **Existing Policy Documents:**

Transport Policy documents related to low-cost mobility are few and include

- **Transport Sector Policy** This is the nation's mid term plan and is co – ordinated by the Commissioner for Planning, who as a result of PABIC – 1 are planning to have a comprehensive transport policy in place.
- **National Transport Master Plan:** In the absence of the Transport policy in the country, FABIO has initiated the process of putting in place an intergrated transport master plan and a pilote project in Jinja. The issue of bring all the stakeholders including Government on board is crutial given the difficulties in issues of advocacy and lobby FABIO has adopted massive networking and creating strategic alliances with different actors. However, the challenges ahead are atttude and lack of information.

The general lack of knowledge and data about bicycles in Uganda, which not only hardens policy making, but also the advocacy work of NGOs. FABIO / BSPW like all other civil organizations agree that lobbying in developing countries is difficult.

*Despite all this however, FABIO / BSPW is making a break through using different strategies particularly in the direction of the establishing the national NMT master plan. In the year 2001 FABIO organized a Pan African bicycle Conference (PABIC – 1), this was aimed at establishing a bigger framework for the lobby work at a bigger level and also creating a frame work for sharing information. The results of PABIC – 1 made a basis for initiating programs like Low Cost Mobility Initiative (LOCOMOTIVE), which is being implemented in different countries in Africa and Asia.*

### **Overview of Road Safety in Uganda:**

All roads in Uganda are not cycle friendly, that is there are no provisions for cyclists and the cyclist is left with no option but to compete for road space with the motorists. They however have provisions for pedestrians by provision of shoulders. The Police and a few civil society organizations are involved in road safety awareness.

In Uganda however, the attitude of motorists toward pedal cyclists is very negative. Motorists regard themselves as having more right to use road space than the pedal cyclists and pedestrians. Reckless driving and the increasing lack of knowledge for traffic rules by both motorists and cyclists worsen the situation.

A disproportionate share of pedestrians and cyclists is killed in accidents, as is clearly shown in Table 1.

***Table 1 – Reported accidents in Jinja District (2001)***

	<i>Persons killed</i>	<i>Persons injured</i>
<i>Total</i>	64	547
<i>Bicycles</i>	18	145
<i>Pedestrians</i>	29	115

*(Source: District Police, Jinja)*

The relationship between bicycles and education system of Uganda is almost non – existent. In primary schools road safety has been integrated into the school curriculum. However, it only looks at issues of pedestrian transport in relation to motorized transport. Further more, it is not a full time component in the curriculum, but as an extra curricular activity. The higher the levels of Education the more this component diminishes from the Education system.

***Table 2 – Market prices (2002)***

<b>Brand</b>	<b>Price UShs</b>	<b>Price (USD)</b>
Roadmaster	85,000	47
Eastman	85,000	47
Hero	90,000	50
Jupiter	90,000	50
Raleigh	90,000	50
Avon	90,000	50
Phoenix	130,000	72
Mountain Bike (Roadmaster)	160,000	89
Mountain Bike (Japanese brands 2 <sup>nd</sup> hand)	260,000	144

*(Source: Erwin Bos, Frank Mulder, Freek Foster 2003)*