Gabon: Strengthening the Transport Sector

The project —Transport Sector Technical Assistance, later renamed Project for the Adjustment and Planning of the Urban and Transport Sectors — was conceived as an integral part of the government’s overall macroeconomic strategy following the adjustment of the CFA franc. This strategy focused on reducing, rationalizing and improving the efficiency of the private sector, while promoting privatization and increasing competitiveness in the economy. In addition to supporting the government’s macroeconomic policies, the project aimed to strengthen a broad range of capacities in the urban and transport sectors by encouraging the wide participation of government, public sector entities, the private sector and the international donor community in setting the sector strategies.

Impact on the ground

- A strategy and investment program for the transport sector was completed through the Inter-modal Transport Master Plan (1998–2015) and the Declaration of the National Transport Policy, adopted by the government in 1998. Both the transport and urban strategies have been carried out through the participation of working groups, sector seminars, and validated through national sector workshops.
- The Declaration embraces the principles of inter-modal planning, rational programming and economic justification for investments. It also reaffirms the disengagement of the government in public enterprises and reinforces its role as regulator and protector of consumer interests. This has resulted in concrete expressions of interest by the Kuwaiti Fund, the Islamic Development Bank, and the European Investment Bank for investments in the airport, aviation and port subsectors.
- The successful concessioning of the Trans-Gabon Railway Company was a major achievement. The agreement was signed in mid-1999 and the concessionaire officially took control of operations by the end of that year.
- The privatization and restructuring activities for the Port Authority and the National Forwarding Company are in process; and initial audits and studies for the privatization/restructuring of Air Gabon have been completed. Other such activities include the National Shipping Line, the Inland Navigation Company, and the Urban Transit Company.
• Of the many targeted studies done, the one on the Urban Economic Framework was used to integrate the rest into a draft Urban Strategy and investment plan in 1999 — the final Urban Strategy and draft Policy Declaration were completed in March 2000. The approach aims at reconciling the differences of the major institutions involved, i.e., the Ministry of Urbanism, Ministry of Interior and the Municipalities. The approach is to define a series of “win-win” actions that will reinforce the roles of each partner and respond to the service needs of the urban population.

• The physical output of the labor-based pilot operation was the paving of 1.6 km of urban roads, accompanied by drainage structures, sidewalks, intersections, waste collection points and tree-planting. The pilot was implemented through a newly created Unit for Monitoring Employment-Generating Urban Works within the Municipality of Libreville. An NGO was engaged to provide social planning and community participation. The operation generated employment of 37,505 person-days.

• A good deal of knowledge transfer occurred during the project, through the interaction of numerous Gabonese nationals with the various consultants and transport facilitator. Several members of government specifically mentioned this as a significant benefit of the project.

• Another main benefit cited has been the engagement of the concerned stakeholders through the creation of working groups on specific issues and the building of consensus through workshops and thematic seminars.

**Lessons learned**

• Carrying out a limited number of specialized and focused analyses on sub-sectoral issues, which are then put together through an integrating sector study, proved to be the most effective formula for the development of sector strategies and investment plans.

• Flexibility is required when using the participatory approach for working groups. Even when some of the senior members of a Ministry do not actively participate, persisting with whoever is willing and available pays dividends, as in the case of the Ministry of Urbanism, where the dialogue on urban strategy survived various levels of disinterest and non-participation. However, the participatory approach requires more time and significant resources.

• When fundamental reforms are sought, it is useful for the coordination unit to be physically separate from and operationally independent of the government. Because of this separation, the project was able to operate as an honest broker amongst the government units and to be the driving force behind the achievement of the two sector strategies and investment plans.

• While it is possible to formulate a national strategy based on economic considerations and inter-ministerial cooperation, old ways of thinking based on political considerations will probably never disappear completely. Continued animation by a coordination unit may be useful. In this regard, it would have been useful to include in the design a period of continued support to the coordination of the actual implementation of the strategy.

• Policy reform should be accompanied by investment packages. In this case, the World Bank had limited leverage in assuring the long-term application of the policy reforms. Without an accompanying investment package, it is difficult to maintain a continuing dialogue on sector management.

This Infobrief has been excerpted from its Implementation Completion Report No. 20726. For more information, please e-mail Aschliessler@worldbank.org