



RURAL ACCESS

A KEY TO SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT



HELVETAS



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WHY RURAL ACCESS?

An estimated one billion people in low-income countries lack access to all-weather roads.

Effective rural transport is a crucial driver for sustainable development, connecting people to education, jobs and health services. Rural roads can help boost school attendance for young girls, prevent maternal deaths via timely access to health centres, and connect farmers to new markets, increasing and diversifying their income.



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«I get lots of business thanks to the bridge. But the most important thing to me is that my children now have a safe route to school.»

Amritha Bhandari,
mother and owner of a snack bar near the
Ranighat suspension bridge, Hariharpur, Nepal

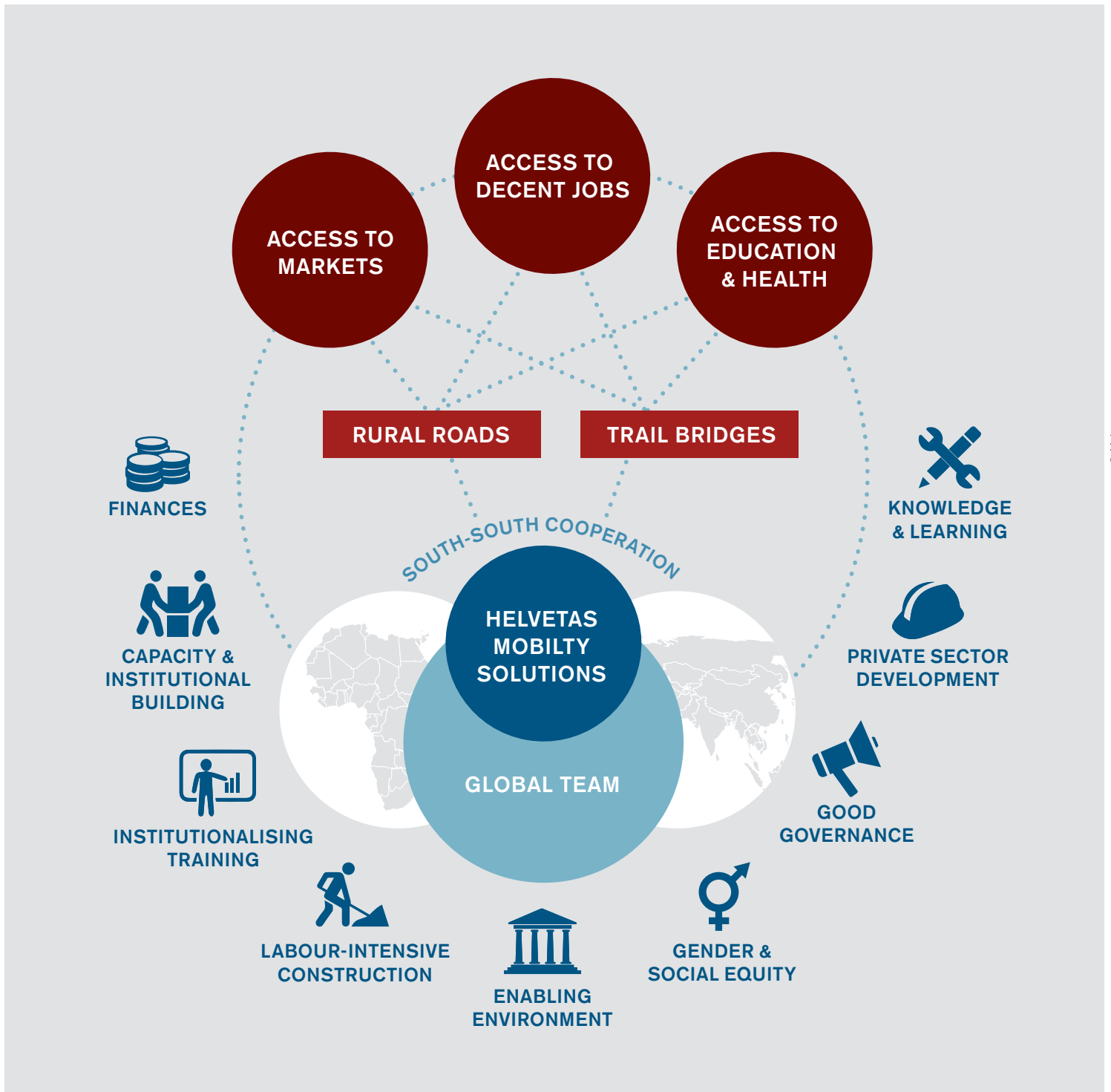


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OUR STRATEGY

The Helvetas approach builds on several decades of experience in the sector. We are especially proud of two achievements: developing a sector-wide approach for trail bridges in Nepal, and integrating labour-intensive road construction in Burkina Faso's national policy.

We are committed to **strengthening the autonomy of local actors** in developing their own rural transport sectors by helping to establish an enabling environment, institutionalising training, investing time and resources in the private sector, developing educational tools and guidelines, and promoting innovation.



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Gender and social equity is a key principle guiding our work. We generate jobs, particularly for women and disadvantaged groups by promoting labour-intensive methods. We also help women seek technical and policy roles, allowing their voices to be heard in key decision-making processes. We work together to recognise, discuss, and find solutions to the heavy and often limiting domestic work burden faced by women.

We also promote **learning and innovation**. To respond to the needs of local farmers in Laos, for example, we have adapted the Nepali trail bridge design in the form of “tractorable” bridges. The design has also been tailored to work effectively in flood-plain areas (multi-span, pile foundation trail bridges), and was successfully piloted in Nepal. The development of **climate-resilient trail bridge standards** is crucial given the vulnerability of transport infrastructure to climate change.

Roads can also be designed as an **instrument of resilience** by improving water management, mitigating the effects of flood and erosion, and controlling dust (green roads).



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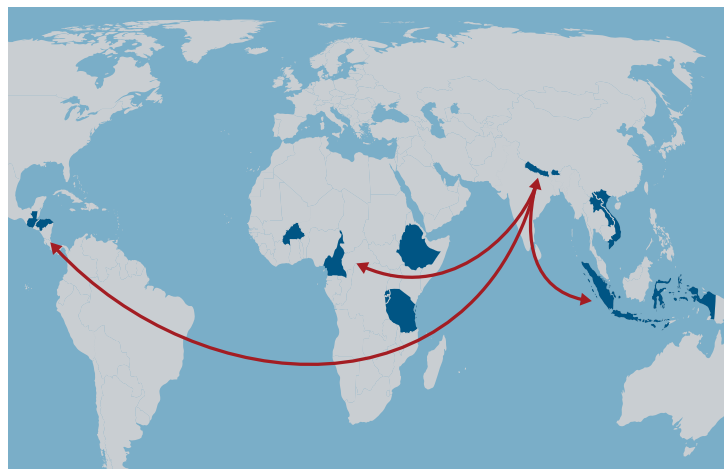
We firmly believe that rural transport infrastructure is a vital **entry point for triggering institutional changes** such as strengthening local governments or civil societies, particularly in challenging political environments.

Helvetas created the Trail Bridge **South-South Cooperation Unit (SSCU)** in 2007, which aims to improve access to basic services and expand economic opportunities for rural populations worldwide.

Helvetas trail bridges and rural roads experts based in Nepal, Ethiopia, and Burkina Faso generate feasibility studies, develop projects, coach surveys, design and construction of trail bridges, monitor the quality of civil works and steel parts, and prepare trainers in a number of countries. The SSCU implements mandates for influential organizations, including the African Development Bank.



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OUR IMPACT

Every year, we help about one million people improve their access to markets, schools, hospitals and other important services by supporting the construction of 500 bridges and 150 km of roads.

Our partner – the Government of Nepal – reports increases in school attendance of more than 20% thanks to the establishment and improvement of trail bridges. The construction of one bridge also injects life into the local economy, providing for approximately 2,600 days of paid labour.

Time saved for a two-way journey	2.7 hours
Average daily traffic count	208 people
Increase in school attendance	22 %
Increase in patients seeking treatment in health facilities	32 %
Bridge sites with newly established shops or markets	39 %

Source: Government of Nepal (2016)



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The economic, social and environmental impact of rural roads cannot be understated. In villages in Burkina Faso, our labour-intensive rural road project has led to increased profit margins in 90% of households thanks to improved access to markets, and supplemental income generated through labour-intensive construction.

Monetary gains have enabled local citizens to improve overall health (79%), increase capital (74%) and improve housing conditions (72%).

In one village we studied, as a result of road construction the percentage of pregnant women who travelled to give birth in a health centre increased from 57% to 97%, helping these women avoid potential complications from giving birth at home.

In terms of the environment, higher water retention levels have led to an increase in roadside land productivity. The water course crossing structures allow for longer periods of animal watering.

Finally, as a result of our interventions in Burkina Faso, the Ministry of Infrastructure has integrated HIMO – or labour-intensive public work programs – into its policy.

OUR VISION

Helvetas is committed to working to help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Connecting people to jobs, education and health services while enhancing market connectedness is a central building block of the 2030 Agenda.

We plan to expand our rural transport initiatives, with a special focus on vulnerable populations by promoting South-South Cooperation. We will also promote integrated mobility solutions by linking rural roads, trail bridges and tracks in other parts of the world, and continue to support climate-resilient infrastructure.

To further maximise the impact of our initiatives, we will also continue to nurture and develop key partnerships with governments, development actors, academic institutions, donors and private investors.



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PUBLICATIONS



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HELVETAS WEBSITES



Rural Access Sector



Ethiopia Trail Bridge Project



Nepal Trail Bridge Project



South-South Cooperation Unit



Burkina Faso Rural Road Project

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CONTACT



Agnes Montangero
Head Strategic Partnerships for Rural Access
agnes.montangero@helvetas.org
www.helvetas.org

