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## ADB-funded iRoads worth US\$ 1.7 billion: Who will look after them in 3 years?

July 9, 2019, 7:43 pm



A bus takes passengers along 14.3 kilometer iRoad between Deniyaya town and Beverly Estate after the new road was made available. Driver M. Shiva told theThe Island Financial Review that he hopes proper care of the road will be taken in the long term to help safety and convenience of the passengers, most of whom make a living by working on tea estates. Photo credit: ADB

By Sanath Nanayakkare

ADB-funded pilot iRoad Network in the Southern Province – built by the RDA costing between Rs. 21 and 26 million per kilometer- will be maintained by the contractors for three years, and then they are to be handed over to local government and provincial council authorities in the Province. However, people in these remote areas fear that their local and provincial councils won't be the best trustees to leave the responsibility with, for maintaining these new roads made to highest standards.

Having spoken to authorities at the Chief Secretary's Office – Southern Province located in Galle, IFR found that there is no clear policy or mechanism designed to maintain the iRoad network in the long term despite the fact that ADB has committed a total of US\$ 1.7 billion for the iRoad Network islandwide.

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 2020-04-24

Competitively chosen contractors; K.D.A. Weerasinghe & Co (Pvt) Ltd, K.D.Ebert & Sons Holdings (Pvt) Ltd, CML-MTD Construction Ltd and R.R. Construction (Pvt) Ltd are obliged by provision {Performance Based Management} to maintain the roads for three years before handing over the responsibility to the regional authorities. Nevertheless, The Island Financial Review (IFR) learnt during a media tour to view the road project that the inhabitants in these areas were not confident that their local authorities would have enough revenue to maintain the roads.

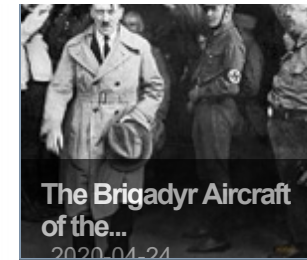
The Project has presented 588.5 km of rural access roads, comprising of 565.6 km of local roads and a further 22.9 km of national roads. The direct impact of it is; the rural population can be conveniently involved in the nationwide economic and social development. However, the slowly but surely emerging issue is; who will look after these roads after the contractors have left?

Anil Perera, engineer, team leader of the iRoad project-Southern Province said that one can't expect the ADB to fund and build the road and then keep on maintaining it. "No, way! We have to find ways and means to maintain the roads without getting them into a state of disrepair or ruin. Contractors spend about Rs. 7,500 to maintain a kilometer of iRoad per month. But local authorities should be able to do the job with Rs. 5,000 per km per month because they are not working for profit. But the concern is; can the councils raise even that amount of money for the purpose?", he queried.

Weeraiya Gandhi and Janaki Gandhi- a senior-citizen couple who had helped the RDA during the road works in Deniyaya told the IFR," It is hard to think that the local authorities will have the resources to maintain the new roads we have received because of ADB funding and RDA implementation. So, we have already started a discussion among the village community to set up our own team to repair potholes as soon as they appear on the road and also clear the roadsides regularly and keep up the present desirable standards. We also have a duty to perform as inhabitants who benefit from the road. However, the local authorities should be able to help and guide us in this regard where necessary because most of the people who live here don't earn much although they are determined to keep the road in good shape".

The iRoad Programme is being implemented from 2014 to 2027 and comprises of eight projects covering all nine provinces. The pilot phase of the iRoad Programme commenced in 2015 in Southern Province covering Galle, Matara, and Hambantota districts.The project is implemented by the RDA under the Executing Authority of the Ministry of Highways and Road Development and Petroleum Resources Development with the donor being the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

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