

Economic and Social Positions of Motorcycle-Taxi Drivers in Urban Uganda

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Place of fieldwork: Republic of Uganda

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Research background

Due to rapid economic development in Uganda, the number of *boda boda* (motorcycle taxis) has skyrocketed in recent years. *Boda boda* are a form of private motorcycle transportation that carries people and goods to a customer's destination. Kampala, the capital city of Uganda, contains a population of approximately 1.5 million, and there are ten thousand motorcycle taxi drivers (Raynor, 2014). The numbers of *boda boda* have skyrocketed recently for three reasons. First, economic development has increased the demand for this type of transportation. Second, youths can enter *boda boda* business without higher education experience and particular skills (Kisaalita & Sentongo-Kibalama, 2007). Finally, imports of these cheap motorcycles from China and India to Uganda have increased the number of *boda boda* in Uganda (Olawo et al., 2014). However, it must be noted that the flourishing *boda boda* business has also generated a few social problems, namely, fatal traffic accidents, theft, and traffic jams.



Photo 1. *Boda boda* in Kampala



Photo 2. *Boda boda* wait for customers

Purpose of this research

The objective of this research is to offer suggestions for solving social problems caused by *boda boda* in urban Uganda. Prior research, which simply involved questionnaire surveys, has only offered superficial information on this subject. Therefore, to expand on this previous work, I undertook intensive and detailed surveys in this current research. I conducted face-to-face interactions with *boda boda* drivers to explore their perspectives on this subject. I believe that capturing micro-viewpoints from these drivers is a useful way of understanding the details of their problems, which in turn provides effective basic data for suggesting solutions to these social problems.

Results and achievements of fieldwork

This research was conducted in three urban areas in Uganda: Masaka, Tororo, and Gulu. Through this research, I uncovered three main conclusions. First, *boda boda* provides a very important form of transport infrastructure for people living in provincial cities, where there are no taxis, and only a few people have their own vehicles. *Boda boda* is the sole transportation means for people in these areas. Second, being a *boda boda* driver is a precious job for youths. For youths who do not have personal social capital, higher education experience, and particular skills, it is difficult to find work. However, if one has a motorcycle and can drive, then one also has a way of earning daily cash income. In fact, many informants in this research told me that they began *boda boda* businesses as a means for survival. Finally, *boda boda* provides footholds of career advancement for youths. For youths without higher education experience and particular skills, it is difficult to get high-income earning opportunities. However, through their involvement in *boda boda* businesses, they can save money every day and gain capital to set up new businesses. In one example from my research, a taxi driver bought his car and started his business after saving enough money through working in the *boda boda* business. Youths who are employed in *boda boda* businesses do not intend to continue that job throughout their lives. All but one informant explained they wanted to move to other employment opportunities that would provide more income.

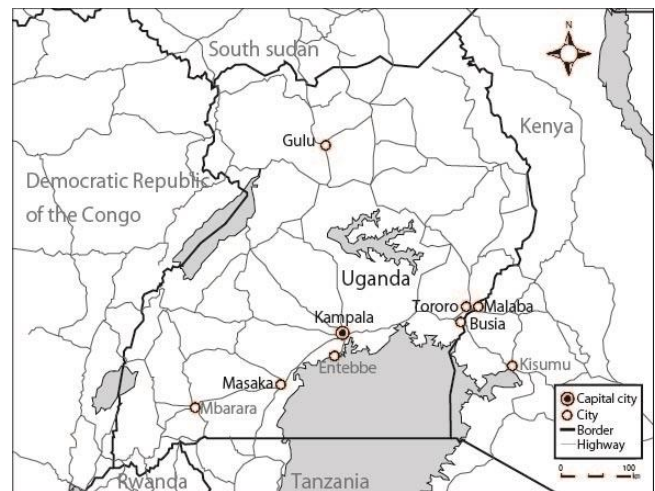


Figure 1. Map of research area

Implications and impacts on future research

In this research, I carried out a survey that covered three areas as a preliminary investigation. In further research, I will select one research site from these three areas and conduct intensive research in order to collect more detailed data. In this current survey, I only collected data from *boda boda* drivers. Therefore, in the next piece of research, I hope to survey motorcycle owners, and the rival businesses of *boda boda*, such as the shared taxi business and the bicycle taxi business. By conducting this research, I hope to understand the circumstances of *boda boda* drivers from

various angles. In order to do this, I also want to improve my ability to communicate in the local language, and therefore be able to obtain data from daily conversations.



Photo 3. Motorcycle shop and garage in Gulu



Photo 4. *Boda boda* carrying a bed



Photo 5. Shared bus



Photo 6. Bicycle taxi

References

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