WORKERS OR PARTNERS?

The political economy of UBER in Dar es Salaam, Nairobi and Johannesburg

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LIST OF FIGURES

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ACSA	Airports Company South Africa
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
DPAK	Digital Partners Association of Kenya in Nairobi
LTRA	Land Transport Regulatory Authority Act
NLTA	National Land Transport Act in South Africa
NLTA	National Transport and Safety Authority Act in Kenya
TODA	Tanzania Online Drivers Association in Dar es Salaam

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The global economy has, over the last two decades, experienced a significant and seismic change in how it is configured and how labour and traditional industries interact as key stakeholders. The 'sharing' or 'gig economy', predicated on the use of smartphone technologies, has reconfigured the global economy by facilitating the entry of new firms into traditional industries such as retail, education and transportation.

In Africa, digital e-hailing platforms (UBER most notably, but also, among others, Taxify in Johannesburg and FastaFasta in Dar es Salaam) have recently entered the public transport markets of these three different cities, experiencing rapid growth and gaining control of significant market shares. These platforms have brought new employment opportunities and new types of work, as the relationship between employers and workers is mediated, for the first time in public transport in these cities, by digital platforms. These new digital transport services have accrued market share previously held and controlled by metered taxis and other established public transport operators. This has led to open confrontation and violence from these operators in Johannesburg and to less stark tensions in Dar es Salaam and Nairobi. Furthermore, the rights as well as labour and income security of drivers who form part of the e-hailing platforms have come into question, with declining and exploitative working conditions coming to the fore as these platforms continue to grow in Africa. With traditional trade unions still grappling with the plight of Uber drivers, or 'gig workers' more generally, it has become necessary to explore how potential union-based and non-union responses can be forged to safeguard drivers against the perils of the e-hailing industry.

The 'Workers or Partners' study sought to canvas the political economy of UBER (used as an all-encompassing term for e-hailing operators), by exploring the functioning of these platforms, their impact on drivers/partners and other public transport operators and the experiences/challenges to organising drivers as workers. Drawing on both qualitative and quantitative fieldwork, the research discovered how key assumptions made in the e-hailing business model create corrosive and exploitative dynamics between UBER drivers, key intermediary stakeholders such as vehicle owners and the UBER platform, impeding efforts to organise effectively. These assumptions that create these corrosive dynamics include the notion that UBER drivers are independent contractors who lease owned assets (vehicles) which would be otherwise idle and underutilised, to peers (riders) for a monetary fare, of which drivers enjoy the full benefits. This assumption, when stress-tested by the respondents in the three cities, is found questionable and borderline inaccurate since a large section of UBER drivers in the region do not own their cars but rather drive those owned by third parties. Furthermore, of the segment of drivers who were vehicle owners, a significant majority procured their vehicles for the sole purposes of UBER, challenging the notion that these assets would be otherwise idle. Key to the corrosive and exploitative dynamics that exist for uber drivers is the generally declining rates of income generated.

With UBER drivers found to either be repaying the debt incurred to purchase their vehicles or paying off weekly income targets set by vehicle owners, the vast majority of drivers in the study indicated their incomes had gradually decreased over time, increasing their average amount of hours worked each week. These corrosive and exploitative employment relations were seen to impact drivers' ability to effectively organise in two ways: extensive risk and low awareness.Threats posed by deactivation of the UBER network, the threat to personal safety and the risk of tensions between drivers and their vehicle owners was seen to significantly impact the appetite to organise. Furthermore, fragmented relationships between drivers and a lack of credible and visible workers organisations for drivers contributed to low levels of awareness of strikes and other related initiatives. The study concludes by exploring potential mechanisms to assist drivers in forming a more robust and effective way of organising against the corrosive and exploitative employment relations faced on the job. Three pathways are identified, namely the creation of worker cooperatives, worker centres and online forums.

THESE PATHWAYS ARE POSITED TO ASSIST IN DE-RISKING UBER WORK THROUGH THE PROVISION OF FINANCIAL AND NON-FINANCIAL SAFETY NETS AND/OR SKILLS DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES, AND TO CREATE AWARENESS OF UBER DRIVERS AND THEIR EXPERIENCES THROUGH LOGGING BOARDS AND INFORMATION REPOSITORIES TO BE USED IN CRITICAL ENGAGEMENTS WITH STAKEHOLDERS.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 BACKGROUND

The emergence of disruptive technologies has shaped the way individuals experience the world, communicate within and between communities, and engage in forms of work to generate income.

Smartphone technology has seen a rapid spike in innovation and proliferation throughout the world with facets of computing, navigation, and internet capabilities asserting these technologies as critical to daily life.

A new economy that has emerged over the past decade, aided by the emergence of smartphone technology, has been the "sharing" or "gig" economy. This economy facilitates the sharing, bartering, swapping, and loaning of objects, assets, or capacities between asset owners and prospective users temporarily. This economy, predicated on the use of smartphone technology to connect service providers directly with a pool of customers, has dislodged traditional intermediary bodies in many industries.

Among the industries impacted by this bourgeoning economy, the transport, hospitality, and retail industries have been affected in the most transformative ways. Platforms such as eBay, Airbnb and Uber have entered these industries and have used disruptive technologies to mediate how customers and their desired services or products interact, effectively replacing traditional hotels, brick-and-mortar retail chains, and traditional taxis and transport operators respectively.

This economy has not only reconfigured how consumers access their desired products or services but have also ushered a new paradigm in the formation of traditional labour markets.

Disruptive technologies, such as smartphone-based applications, have reshaped the traditional labour market in creating new structures and systems of management, supervising, performance evaluation and control without any explicit and tangible hierarchy in working relationships. This has been primarily due to the self-proclaimed intermediary role that these services have been classified as, acting as a "go-between" for the service provider and consumer. This labour market reconfiguration has significantly affected labour bargaining as these technologies operate outside the confines of traditional forms of work, placing pressure on gig economy workers, who often straddle between the ambiguous interfaces of worker, producer and contractor.

Ride-sharing service Uber has experienced the most rapid ascent in recent years, taking over traditional transport markets across the world and asserting itself as one of the most widely spread, high-value gig economy firms in the world.

As the service has expanded to virtually every continent in the world, surpassing 1,1 million driver-partners in 2015, it has grown into a juggernaut in global commuter transport.

The expansion, however, has not come without controversy. The platform's use of "independent contractor" drivers and regulatory evasion has been critiqued in many territories with multiple instances of strike action and bans imposed on the service.

At the heart of this controversy, has been Uber's ability to operate outside of the confines of traditional transport regulation and, as consequence, use labour without an obligation to safeguard working conditions.

This has sparked anger among competitors, due to loss of market share, as well as among labour organisations, owing to the continual decline in income and increase in working hours observed by drivers on the service.

2.2 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to explore the e-hailing industry phenomena more closely, with a focus on Uber (and related services) and the effect that these services have on work, employment and public transport in the developing world. Three urban centres in Africa, namely Nairobi, Dar es Salaam and Johannesburg are used as case studies to examine how labour has been configured and the resulting impacts experienced by drivers. This is to piece together challenges and opportunities to organise drivers in the three cities to combat the adverse working conditions creating contestations globally. Specifically, this research study explores:

- The economics and labour relations of e-hailing in Africa: unpacking the strategy used by services such as Uber to enter African markets and the mechanisms used to attract, retain, and manage drivers.
- The career and occupational trajectories of drivers in this sector, particularly the expectations and latent financial and non-financial barriers associated with operating in the industry.
- The initiatives, strategies, and outcomes of various attempts to organise drivers in this territory.

This serves to open a wider conversation around the nuances inherent in gig economy firms operating in Africa and the unique challenges faced by workers in this environment.

The organising of workers will be explored with possible mechanisms to advocate for improved and equal labour relations in this sector, potentially laying a blueprint for workers in other gig economy firms throughout the developing world.

2.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In actioning the study, data was collected to gain information and insight regarding the experiences of Uber drivers in the three cities of focus. This included a survey of 300 drivers across all cities to collect information about the demographics, financial and non-financial circumstances, and relationships drivers share with Uber and other critical stakeholders in the ride-sharing value chain. Researchers downloaded the ride-sharing apps and requested rides within the parameters of these cities.

They then asked each driver for consent to participate in the study. Face-to-face interviews were also conducted with several drivers, public officials, and key transport stakeholders in each city. The collection of data in the three cities was facilitated and headed by Dr Matteo Rizzo of SOAS University of London, and assisted by a team of researchers in each city.

3. UBER ECONOMICS AND LABOUR RELATIONSHIPS

3.1 MARKET ENTRY STRATEGY

Uber was the first ride-sharing service to launch on the African continent. In 2012, the South African cities of Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban became the first African cities in which UBER launched operations. This was followed by a rapid expansion to seven more countries on the continent by 2019. While additional competitors such as BOLT (formally Taxify) and FastaFasta have since launched similar services, Uber is the largest ride-sharing service on the African continent. In the eight years since launching in Africa, Uber has accumulated over 60 000 drivers across the continent, displacing local transport operators, taxis, and metered cabs in the process.

Uber's entry into the African market, and the underlying strategy used to do so, is both unique and typical of similar expansions in other global regions. In understanding how Uber's entry into Africa has been unique, two key phenomena are identified as possible enablers. First, relaxed regulations in Africa, particularly in the three cities of focus, are argued to have significantly lowered the barriers to entry for Uber, enabling its rapid expansion and labour attraction. Secondly, shrewd and agile business model adjustments by Uber to adapt to Africa's unique operating environment is argued to aid its continued growth and expansion on the continent. These two phenomena will form the basis for examining the strategy and conditions that have lured such a large sum of labour onto the platform.

3.1.1 Relaxed regulatory barriers

The regulatory frameworks governing transport in South Africa, Kenya and Tanzania had little to no provisions and requirements for technology-based firms such as Uber. Initial iterations of the National Land Transport Act (NLTA) in South Africa, the National Transport and Safety Authority Act (NTSA) in Kenya and the Land Transport Regulatory Authority Act (LTRA) in Tanzania created regulatory ambiguity that enabled Uber's entry into those markets.

In the context of south africa, uber's first entry point on the continent, the metered taxi industry faced stringent requirements around having physical distance and price meters installed in their vehicles along with physical stickers or signage differentiating them from ordinary private vehicles.

This was coupled with them having to obtain and periodically renew permits of operations, which were bound provincially and to a specific timeframe. These requirements not only limited the metered taxi industry's ability to operate across broad geography but also imposed financial constraints around erecting infrastructure and permit costs associated with conforming with the NLTA. The metered taxi industry also faced constraints that fell outside of traditional regulatory frameworks, such as site-specific requirements and permissions. South African airports, which are traditional hotspots for metered taxi trips, required permits for taxi operators within the precincts, typically issued by Airports Company South Africa (ACSA). In contrast, upon launching in South Africa, Uber was not held to these regulatory requirements and the financial and non-financial constraints associated with it.

This is due to Uber's misclassification, enabling the service to circumvent the obligations reserved for their metered taxi competitors and to accrue market share through unrestricted access to multiple markets across several provinces in the country. With the ability to field cars at airports, across provinces and without the physical signage and meters differentiating themselves from private vehicles, Uber benefitted from an uneven and unequal market that suppressed competition. Kenya and Tanzania's regulatory environment provided similar advantages to ride-sharing services. Uber's entry into these markets in 2015 and 2016 respectively was met with similarly unclear and opaque regulatory approaches to e-hailing services. The NTSA and LTRA placed similar obligations to local taxi and meter cab operators, with permits required to operate, often confined to specific geographies, and with associated financial implications.

Furthermore, local operators' price-setting mechanisms were controlled through these regulations, and they were required to have passenger safety measures and physical signage to differentiate these providers from private vehicles. As was the case in South Africa, local operators in Tanzania and Kenya faced limitations on their ability to access markets outside of their permitted zones, with financial constraints often influencing their fare-price setting measures. Upon launching, Uber benefitted owing to its ambiguous 'technology company' classification – they gained unbridled and unfettered access to the market share previously held by taxi and metered cab operators, with the ability to draw clientele through uncompetitive pricing and scaled operations over wider geography than their traditional competitors.

In conclusion, while relaxed regulations for gig-economy firms like Uber is a global phenomenon, Uber's entry into the African market was significantly enabled and advantaged by this relaxation. Without facing limitations on their geography of operations, physical infrastructure and financial resources (normally required to attain operating permits), Uber gained access to market share originally occupied by traditional metered and taxi cab providers.

While this set the groundwork for the acquisition of a large portion of labour to work on the service, it did result in resource conflicts both internally in the Uber network and externally with competitors. However, an additional enabling factor that aided Uber's entry into the African market was the business model adjustments they made in reaction to the unique operating environment in Africa.

3.1.2 Business model adjustments

Since its inception, Uber's traditional method of facilitating payments between drivers and riders has been via cashless, credit card transactions. This is made possible through the rider loading their card details on the Uber app with the trip fair pulled from the rider's card at the start of each trip. However, as Uber has expanded to markets outside of the United States, they have changed payment options to suit the unique trading environments in different regions. In 2015, Uber integrated physical cash payment capability between drivers and riders, with the first successful pilot in Nairobi, Kenya. With a sophisticated mobile money system and proliferation of physical cash transactions, Kenya proved to be fertile ground to introduce a payment option falling outside the confines of merchant transactions.

The cash payment model includes riders providing drivers with cash for their trips, from which drivers keep the full payments with Uber deducting service fees from their total earnings for the week and/or month. The piloting of cash payment services "transformed the business" in the region, according to uber sub-saharan general manager, alon lits, with uber commandeering a larger portion of the kenyan ride-sharing market.

Following the success of the cash payment system in Kenya, Uber expanded the model to all its cities in Africa. Key to the success of cash payments in this region is the significantly low rates of online payments and e-commerce activity in developing economies. Africa accounts for a small share of global card payment and e-commerce revenues globally, with a market five times smaller than the Asian and North American markets respectively. Uber's ability to make tweaks to its business model to adapt to the African market has been a significant contributor to its aggressive and meteoric ascend in the region.

While the cash payment option has facilitated greater ease of access for riders and enabled significant expansion for the service, it has also placed a set of unique working conditions for drivers in the region, placing new safety concerns at the fore. However, in underscoring Uber's rapid expansion in Africa's transport industries, especially in the countries of focus, an exploration of the mechanisms and value propositions that have attracted drivers to the platform will help in understanding how the service has become such a large actor on the continent's transport sector.

3.2 DRIVER ATTRACTION AND RETENTION STRATEGY

Central to Uber and similar ride-sharing services is the existence of labour or "driver-partners" that offer vehicles for consumers to ride temporarily in exchange for a monetary fare. The process of attracting such a large swathe of driver-partners to Uber, and related services, has been largely down to the perceived attractiveness of Uber as a flexible and easily accessible mode of employment.

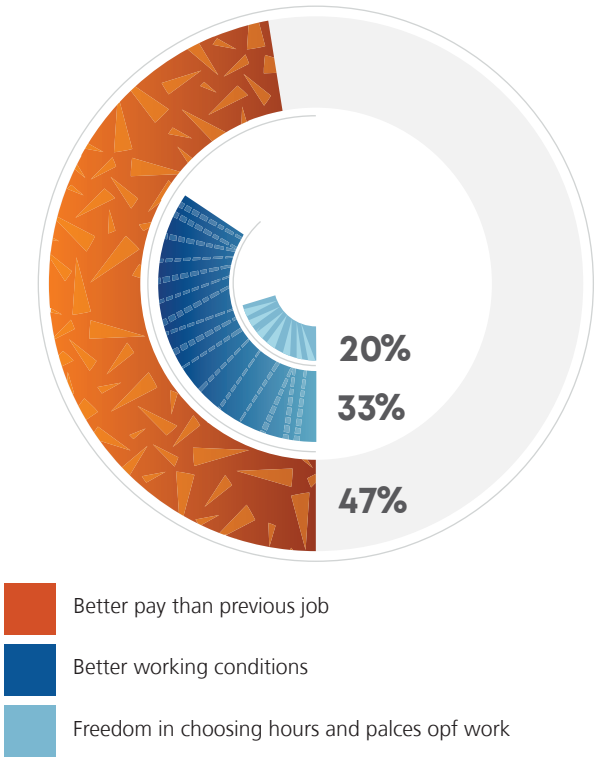
This section will, aided by data collected from driver respondents in the cities of focus, explore the critical factors associated with the acquisition of drivers and the expectations harboured from the service. These expectations will form the basis for exploring the predominant employment relations that exist once drivers have accessed the Uber network and the various tensions and constraints inherent to their day-to-day work.

3.2.1 Driver motivations and expectations

Uber's participation and presence in the African market is mediated and influenced by operating conditions unique to the African continent, often shaping the perspectives of workers and labour market participants in the region. This is reflected in the responses received by respondents when asked what the primary motivation was in attracting them to the Uber network.

The most popular motivation for joining Uber, and similar ride-sharing services, was the perceived freedom and flexibility to choose one's hours and places of work (47%). The second was that the service offered better pay than their previous sources of employment (33%), with an additional reason being the better working conditions offered by Uber and similar services (20%).

Figure 1: Motivation for joining UBER and related services



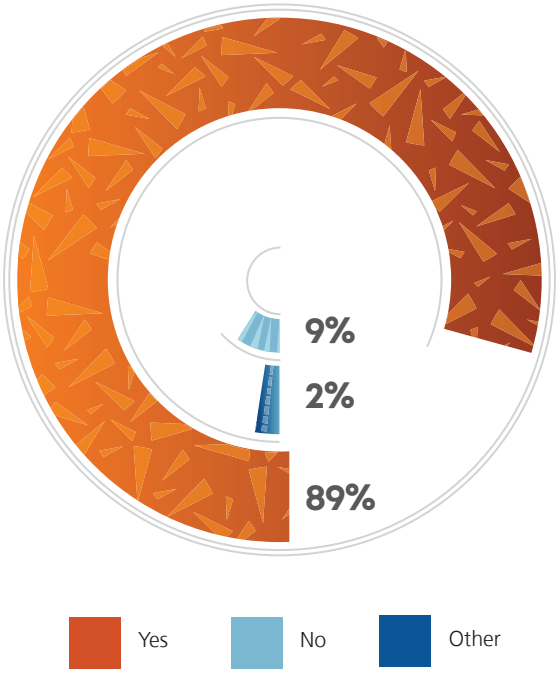
Flexibility is an unsurprisingly popular motivating factor, with Uber and other firms across the gig economy championing labour flexibility as a key factor to operating model value propositions, however, the African experience illustrates that flexibility has far-reaching implications when taking into account vehicle ownership, a phenomenon which will be explored in the next section.

3.2.2 Flexibility and autonomy

Freedom and flexibility are key value propositions associated with Uber, with the service often championing slogans such as "set your own schedule" and "make money on your own terms" as the key benefits behind drivers joining the service. This is reflected in the responses given by drivers, framing flexibility as a key initial driving factor behind joining the service.

THE MOST POPULAR MOTIVATION FOR JOINING UBER, AND SIMILAR RIDE-SHARING SERVICES, WAS THE PERCEIVED FREEDOM AND FLEXIBILITY TO CHOOSE ONE'S HOURS AND PLACES OF WORK (47%).

Figure 2: Responses given when asked if rating system was important to drivers



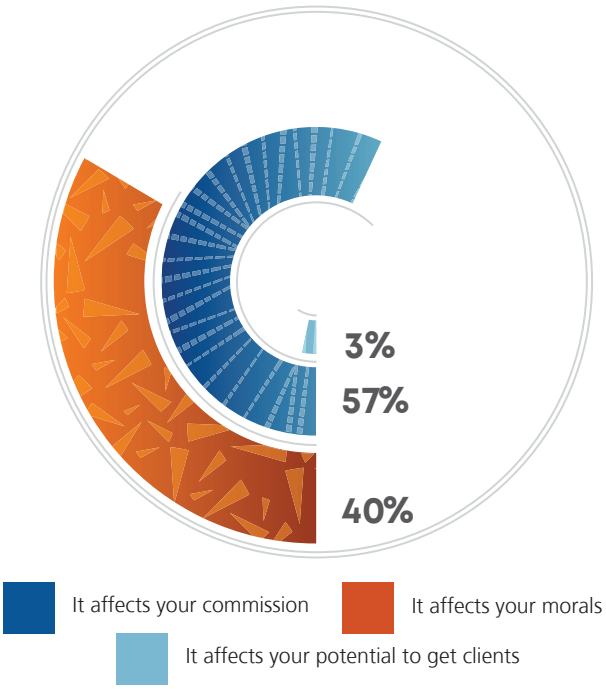
The premise behind the flexibility afforded by gig economy firms like Uber is in the fact that labour on the service is not managed and supervised through traditional human managerial structures and organisational hierarchies, determining the operating hours and daily tasks carried out by labour. Instead, applications such as Uber use rating systems for drivers and passengers, serving as a mechanism to track performance and evaluate a driver's applicability to continue operating on the service. This is part of a broader trend in workplace management, classified as 'algorithmic management', describing a 'diverse set of technological tools and techniques to remotely manage workforces, relying on data collection and surveillance of workers to enable automated or semi-automated decision making'.

These rating systems thus become an important component in drivers' day-to-day work, often determining the actions and behaviours of drivers and acting as a tacit retention strategy for drivers to continue operating and access further earnings.

This is validated by the respondents who confirmed the importance of driver ratings on their work and the potential it enables for future earnings. 89% of all respondents in all three cities agreed that the driver rating system was important to them. The driver and passenger rating is an aggregation of the ratings given between passengers and drivers, with a rating given between 1 to 5 stars for both passenger and drivers after the completion of each trip. The average rating is displayed on the smartphone app and is visible when a passenger requests a ride.

While the driver rating system is not a critical consideration for assessing why Uber drivers join the service, it is a key instrument in embedding the practice of flexibility into Uber's business model by shifting supervisory and managerial tasks from human beings to smartphone applications that do not explicitly direct drivers but merely evaluate their performance on an ad-hoc basis.

Figure 3: Reasons provided explaining why driver rating system is important



The driver rating system, as an instrument for flexibility in the gig economy, also serves as a key variable in assessing driver behaviour. When asked why the driver rating was important, drivers explained that it was important in ensuring access to the Uber network, and by extension, protecting the stream of income generated on the service. This is since each city on Uber's global network has its minimum rating that drivers must maintain to stay active on the platform. This provides drivers with an instrument to control income and further solidify the perceived flexibility they enjoy on the service. Flexibility as an instrument for income control is key to framing and exploring how the perceived flexibility given to drivers affects and is affected by the predominant employment relations that govern the platform.

3.3 THE LAW OF DIMINISHING EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS

3.3.1 The UBER assumption: ownership, idle capacity and independence

The prevailing employment relations that exist within Uber, and indeed ride-sharing more generally, have been contentious from the inception of this bourgeoning industry. At the heart of the contestation is the labour classification given to Uber drivers. Generally, firms within the gig economy use the term "independent contractor" to classify participants, renters, or lessors of services. This is because firms like Uber use technology to connect the "networks" of individuals within a crowd-based marketplace where peers exchange services. Drivers, in this case, are service providers who share assets, resources, time and/or skills, typically as private individuals who share services on an occasional basis. This business model is typically premised on the assumption that peers share assets and resources that are their own, therefore enjoying the full monetary benefits associated with the value of those assets. Moreover, the assets and resources that service providers share with customers are assumed to be idling and underutilised, with service providers seeking utilisation through a technological platform such as Uber, turning idle capacity into productive resources.

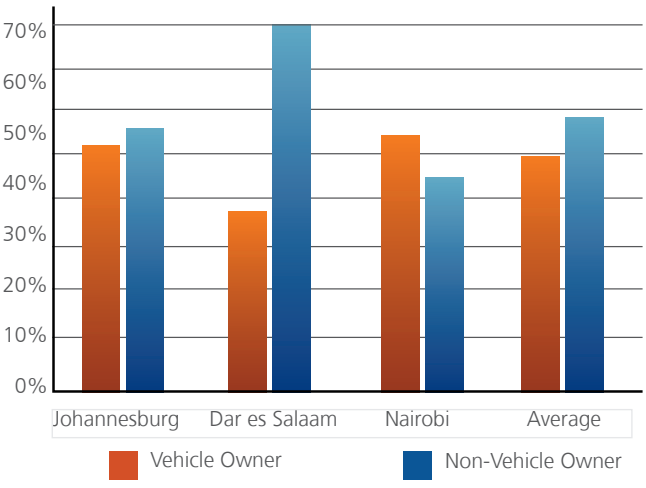
This means that Uber's business model operates largely on the premise that "driver-partners" flexibly share their owned and idling asset, in this case, an unused vehicle, to riders – thus creating productive capacity for the car and generating a source of income for the asset owner, who is assumed to be the driver. In examining the employment relations that exist in Johannesburg, Nairobi, and Dar es Salaam as three urban centres in the heart of the African context, this assumption is found to create precarious and unequal working conditions for drivers.

This will be substantiated by looking at the asset ownership of drivers, the resulting financial burdens carried, the income trajectories observed by drivers in this environment, and how all of this is placing increased strain on the income, labour market, and physical security of drivers.

3.3.2 The perils of vehicle ownership

As explained, firms across the gig economy provide a platform for asset owners to generate revenue by turning idling capacity into productive capacity. This makes asset ownership critical to a service provider's perceived "independence" and the freedom to use the asset as he/she would like. In the fieldwork conducted in the three cities, vehicle ownership was a key departure from the intention of the Uber business model.

Figure 4: Vehicle Ownership Among Drivers



On average, most drivers surveyed indicated that they did not own the vehicles they drove on the network. This was most apparent in Dar es Salaam with 74% of drivers indicating they drove a vehicle owned by a third party. Johannesburg registered similar results albeit at a reduced majority, while just over half of respondents in Nairobi indicated that they owned their vehicles. On average, 56% of drivers across all cities did not own the cars they drove. This is at odds with the intended benefits associated with Uber and other gig economy firms. Also, this questions whether the initial motivations of "flexibility" that attracted drivers to the Uber platform are seen in their day-to-day work. When exploring whether drivers in the three cities offered services that would otherwise be "idling", another departure is seen.

3.3.3 The perils of idle capacity

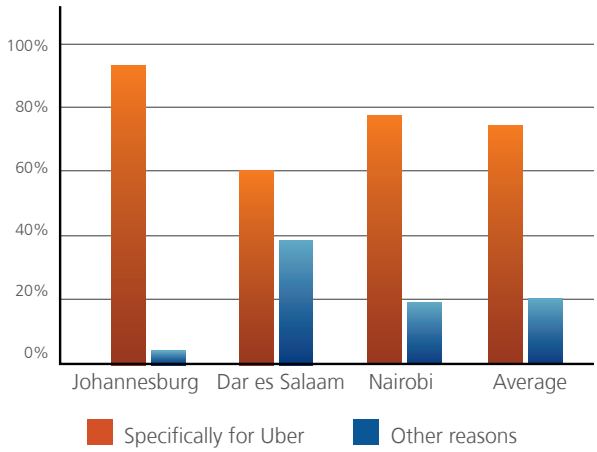
The cohort of drivers who indicated that they owned their cars also unravelled an additional implication, particularly in the assumption of idle capacity. The idea of idling capacity, as understood in the gig economy, is that service providers have assets that are underutilised and not productive, with technology applications helping utilise those assets.

However, in surveying the reasons why drivers purchased their vehicles, the assumption of idle capacity becomes questionable. When asked what the purpose was behind their vehicle purchase(s), most drivers indicated that they had bought it for e-hailing activities, specifically for the Uber network.

On average, 76% of drivers who owned their cars purchased them specifically for that task. This means that there was no "idle capacity" in the first instance, as without the Uber service, drivers would not have that required utilisation.

An inference that can be drawn from this is that Uber, in all three cities, created capacity rather than merely facilitating that capacity being utilised.

Figure 5: Purpose for purchasing vehicle



The assumption of ownership and idle capacity as two components of the gig economy and Uber are found to be not represented when looked at in the context of three African cities.

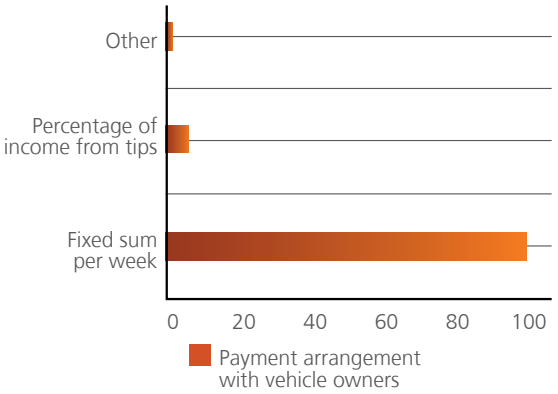
These assumptions shape the employment relations for drivers in these environments, placing unintended financial and non-financial constraints and creating unequal and exploitative working environments therein. To better understand the perils behind the disjuncture between Uber's business model and driver ownership status, it is useful to explore income trajectories and financial constraints.

3.3.4 The perils of independence

On average, more Uber drivers in the three cities drive vehicles owned by third parties, while the balance of drivers have mostly purchased their vehicles specifically for Uber purposes.

This undermines two key characteristics of the gig economy's operating model, sharing owned assets, and sharing owned assets that would otherwise be idle. This results in unequal relationships between drivers and other key stakeholders such as vehicle owners, customers, and the Uber platform and creates a form of tacit control of drivers by the platforms they drive on.

Figure 6: Payment arrangement with vehicle owners



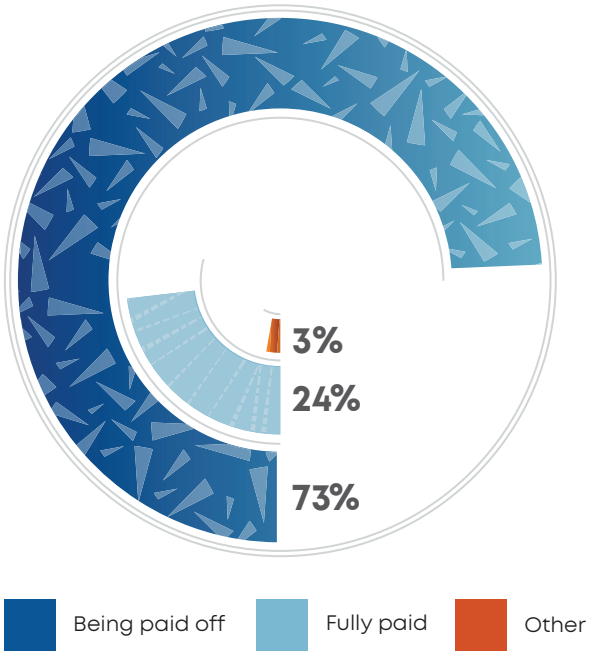
Furthermore, an exploitative environment is created where drivers must increasingly work more hours for declining levels of income. As stated, on average, most drivers in the three cities drive cars owned by third parties.

When asked who these third parties were, responses varied with the most popular response being that the car(s) belonged to a friend (59,4% of all drivers). The implications of not owning the car are that there are financial obligations owed between the driver and the car owner, with the car owners generally setting weekly targets for drivers to attain. The nature of these targets varies usually, however, driver respondents indicated that the payment arrangements were generally fixed sums owed to vehicle owners every week.

These fixed sum targets do not change with the fluctuations and intangible changes that can happen to a driver's working environment, such as dips in consumer purchasing power, unforeseen environmental issues or protests and industrial action.To discern if drivers were able to meet these targets, a large portion of drivers (61,3%) across the three cities indicated that they generally met their targets.

However, in exploring how these targets were being met, it came to light that drivers were having to work increasingly longer hours. Most drivers indicated that they worked between 6-7 days a week, with an average of 6,3 days a week worked by drivers across the three cities.

Figure 7: Loan repayment status



Furthermore, this was juxtaposed with the income trajectories experienced by drivers since joining the service. When asked if the money earned from the Uber service had increased or decreased, 59% of drivers indicated that their income had decreased since joining the service.

One can infer that drivers are increasingly facing exploitative conditions of work as their working hours continue to increase while incomes decrease with the financial obligations owed to vehicle owners, over and above vehicle maintenance and upkeep. Furthermore, there is another set of unique challenges for the workers that drive self-owned vehicles.

Most drivers who owned their vehicles indicated that these vehicles were either bought through savings or loans. The results across cities varied, with Johannesburg drivers acquiring their vehicles generally through loans

(46%), Nairobi drivers acquiring their vehicles through a combination of loans and savings (77,9%) and drivers in Dar es Salaam indicating they had used savings (66%). Moreover, of the drivers who had acquired their vehicles through loans, the vast majority indicated that they were still paying off the loans.

This has implications on the income garnered from the Uber service with the assumption of "idle capacity" again proving to be inaccurate and creating an exploitative relationship between drivers and the Uber platform. Perhaps one of the largest variables that challenge the assumption of driver independence is the role that opaque and hidden algorithms have on a driver's behaviour and movements.

Chief among the global critiques of gig economy platforms like Uber is that of 'algorithmic management'. This is generally described as a "system of control where self-learning algorithms are given the responsibility for making and executing decisions affecting labour", meaning that human involvement and oversight of the labour process' algorithmic management plays a central role in how drivers engage in their work.

In the case of Uber, the smartphone app serves as a tool to execute algorithmic management on drivers. The smartphone app stipulates where drivers should conduct ride pick-ups (in the form of dynamic pricing and location-specific surge pricing), how drivers conduct their behaviour (through peer-to-peer rating systems) and how often a driver works (through persistently declining commissions, leading to increased working hours).

The notion of driver independence comes under severe scrutiny when one looks at how the smartphone application exerts tactic control over how they go about their day-to-day work.

3.4 CONCLUSION

This section has sought to illustrate how Uber's entry into the African market was buffered and enabled by a relaxed and ambiguous regulatory environment and business model modifications to suit the region. Also, drivers have been attracted and retained on the service through the allure of flexibility and the relaxed managerial systems associated with the Uber service, particularly the rating system.

Instead of the flexibility that initially attracted drivers to the service, the fact that drivers are not owners of the assets being shared and the assets not being idle, as assumed through the gig economy pattern of transactions, means that drivers are subjected to increasingly exploitative working conditions due to the financial burdens carried through meeting targets of vehicle owners and/or repaying loans.

Furthermore, drivers are also under the control of smartphone applications which serve as an instrument to exert algorithmic management of driver behaviour, further constraining their day-to-day work. In further underlying the precarious environments that drivers experience in the three African cities of focus, the next section will provide a broader view of the demographic inherent in the industry, the interlinking class and financial and non-financial barriers associated to this kind of work and the career trajectories observed.

This will provide the foreground for understanding driver attitudes and a general appetite for engaging in activities of formal organisation and collective action.

FURTHERMORE, DRIVERS ARE ALSO UNDER THE CONTROL OF SMARTPHONE APPLICATIONS WHICH SERVE AS AN INSTRUMENT TO EXERT ALGORITHMIC MANAGEMENT OF DRIVER BEHAVIOUR, FURTHER CONSTRAINING THEIR DAY-TO-DAY WORK.

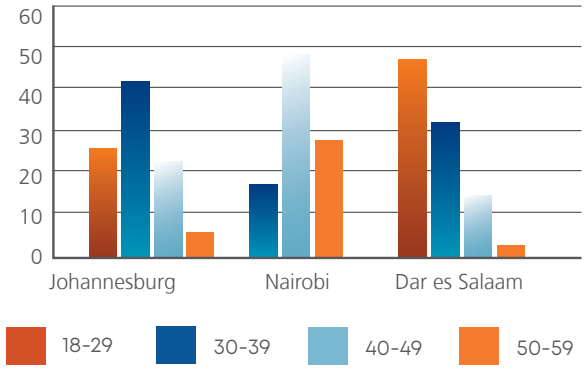
4. UBER CAREERS: NETWORK ACCESS, EXPECTATIONS AND CONSTRAINTS

4.1 DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE AND NETWORK ACCESS

As intimated in the previous section, teasing out the demographic, financial and non-financial attributes of Uber drivers in the three cities in focus, whilst gaining a sense of their career trajectories, will be critical to piecing together their political attitudes and appetite towards formal and collective action. With Uber's pool of drivers exceeding 60 000 across the African continent, there are common demographic threads across the three cities of focus, with differences seen in the age mix.

Uber drivers across the three cities are almost exclusively male (97%), with varying ages depending on the city in question. Dar es Salaam had the youngest pool of drivers with 47% of respondents between the ages of 18-29. Nairobi boasted the oldest pool of drivers with 76% of drivers between the ages of 40-59. Johannesburg had a more even spread with the 30-39-year bracket most common (44%).

Figure 8: Driver Age Range



Driver nationalities also had common trends, particularly in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam with a deviation in Johannesburg. All driver respondents in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam were natives to the respective countries, while 29% of respondents in Johannesburg came from other countries, most commonly Zimbabwe. The large portion of drivers from foreign countries in Johannesburg is in line with South Africa's significant history of cross-border migration. With an economy buffered and strengthened through a migrant labour system, Johannesburg's driver population serves as an extension of the country's broader labour pool, with a high degree of Zimbabwean migrants engaging in low- and unskilled forms of work.

Driver foreignness increases the relative labour market vulnerability typically experienced by Ubers, these vulnerabilities, and their relationship with organising strategies will be unpacked later in the study.

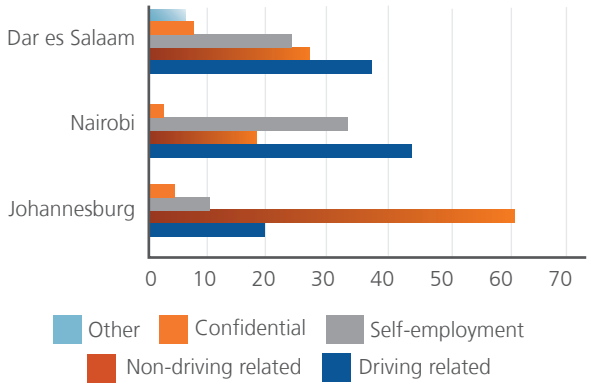
Drivers across the three cities were generally married with dependents (59%). Most tellingly, only a fraction of drivers across all three cities had educational qualification beyond the completion of secondary school (45% of all drivers had completed secondary school as their highest qualification with the balance having not completed their secondary school qualifications).

4.2 EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

In fully understanding the demographic profile of drivers across the cities, their professional background is key in ascertaining their attitude towards working within the industry and their approach to managing the various constraints and challenges inherent in ridesharing. As highlighted, most driver respondents across the three cities of focus were males, albeit of varying ages.

A large portion of drivers in Dar es Salaam and Nairobi indicated that they were in driving roles before joining Uber, while most drivers in Johannesburg came from non-driving related work. It could be inferred that the sheer scale of Uber's operations in South Africa, which is roughly three times larger than that of Kenya and Tanzania combined, has created an absorption of labour from industries outside of driving or transportation.

Figure 9: Previous Employment of Drivers



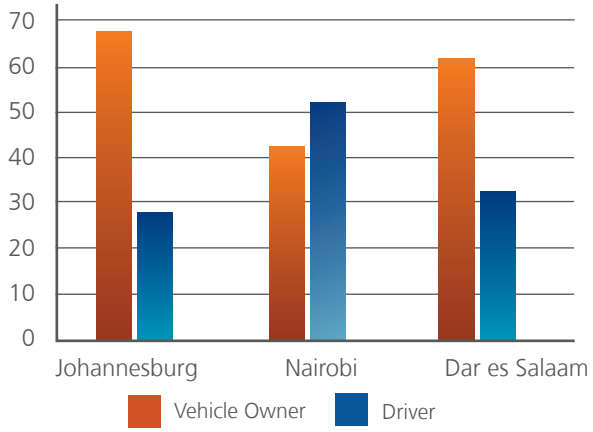
As explained in the previous section, Uber, as a firm within the gig economy, is predicated on the asset owners leasing their idling assets temporarily, creating utilisation. However, Uber drivers across the three cities explained that Uber was, primarily, a source of employment, and more importantly, their only source of employment. 81% of all drivers across the three cities indicated that Uber was their sole source of employment while 19% indicated that they had other sources of income outside of the service.

The demographic profile of drivers, particularly the educational and employment backgrounds are all key contributors that inform the attitudes of drivers in managing the risks associated with collective action against specific challenges faced on the job. This demographic profile also has a bearing on the financial and non-financial constraints associated with operating on the service, with an additional set of challenges informing attitudes around organising.

4.3 FINANCIAL AND NON-FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS

It is important to note, given that the lion share of drivers are married men with no post-school qualifications, the lean requirements of becoming Uber drivers have a significant appeal relative to other options in the constrained employment markets of the developing world. Requirements to work on the Uber platform include obtaining a valid professional driving permit, completion of a safety screening, passing a driving evaluation and attending Uber training. These access requirements present a perceived low-risk pathway to secure employment. However, given that most drivers have been found to not own assets in the form of cars, coupled with the dependencies associated with cohabitation and marital commitments, there is a range of financial and non-financial constraints associated with operating on the Uber network.

Figure 10: Service Cost Funder



These constraints, when considered in conjunction with the myth of idle capacity and ownership explained in the previous section, begin to tell the full picture of driver exploitation in the industry. Over and above the initial entry requirements to gaining entry to the Uber service, there are several costs found to constrain the income of drivers and suppress any form of micro accumulation.

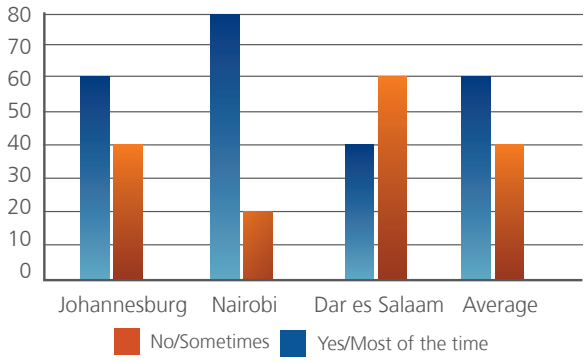
Chief among these costs are costs considered to be "on the road" costs, incurred in the line of work. These costs include the acquisition of mobile data, periodic car washes in line with service delivery standards, and fuel – all having a significant effect on the income of drivers. Another financial constraint identified was that of vehicle service, which in some cases, was designated to drivers and vehicle owners. For the pool of drivers that use self-owned vehicles, these costs are compounded with the loan repayments incurred when acquiring the vehicles.

For drivers using vehicles owned by third parties, these service costs are likely incorporated into the fixed-sum targets expected by vehicle owners each week, driving up working hours.

Consraints experienced by drivers span beyond the line of work with, as explained earlier, most drivers having to service personal debts, dependents, and accommodation costs, with 77% of drivers across the three cities living in rented homes as an example.

In fully contextualising the costs, drivers expressed, in most cases, that the incomes derived from the ride-sharing industry were insufficient in covering their monthly expenses – a phenomenon compounded by the fact that they have observed a general decrease in their incomes since joining the industry. While Uber drivers face significant constraints in meeting personal costs, there is also a range of non-financial constraints that are experienced as a result of the operating environment created by ride-sharing infiltration into the transport sectors across the three cities. These non-financial constraints are unique depending on the three cities, but all can be attributed to the regulatory ambiguity that has enabled Uber's market entry and labour attraction strategies.

Figure 11: Respondents when asked if UBER income covered personal costs



Across all three cities, 51% of drivers had observed experiencing work-related stress, with 76% observing unfair treatment from clients.

A phenomenon that was unique to Dar es Salaam and Nairobi was police harassment, with 46,5% of drivers in those cities explaining that it was a significant issue. In Johannesburg, harassment from metered taxi cabs, a local competitor service, was common with drivers, with 78% of drivers on the receiving end.

4.4 CONCLUSION

In exploring the demographic profile of drivers, their sources of employment both previous and current, and the financial and non-financial constraints associated with operating on the service, three key insights emerge.

First, Uber drivers are generally in a limited position to access other forms of employment with the same ease of access that Uber affords.

Second, Uber and related services provide a confined and singular source of income to drivers, generally derived from vehicle owners through fixed-sum payment arrangements.

Third, the demographic, limitation in employability and lack of asset ownership places significant financial and non-financial constraints on drivers, heightening the risk associated with engaging in any activities that could terminate the singular source of income. These phenomena create a framework in which to interpret the prevailing attitudes and challenges associated with organising drivers in the three cities, which will be covered in the following section.

“CONSRAINTS EXPERIENCED BY DRIVERS SPAN BEYOND THE LINE OF WORK WITH MOST DRIVERS HAVING TO SERVICE PERSONAL DEBTS, DEPENDENTS, AND ACCOMMODATION COSTS...”

5. DRIVER ORGANISATION: TACTICS, CHALLENGES & SUCCESSES

It has been argued, in the previous two sections, that Uber drivers face significant challenges in achieving sustained measures of positive financial and non-financial outcomes from the e-hailing sector. This is owed to factors that are both unique to the African context, and common in the gig economy more broadly.

As highlighted in earlier sections, the employment relations along with the financial and non-financial constraints associated with working on the Uber platform have placed drivers in a position of limited labour market mobility, limited protection from unsafe working conditions and declining incomes. It is from this departure that we explore in this section how that affects efforts to organise drivers in the sector.

5.1 STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES TO ORGANISING IN THE E-HAILING SECTOR

Worker categorisation is fundamentally the biggest challenge for drivers to participate in collective action. The question of whether drivers are self-employed or employees has a significant bearing on the legitimacy and stakeholder buy-in of mobilisation attempts in the sector.

The increasing number of strikes globally in the e-hailing sector illustrates that drivers' working conditions have similarities to those of individuals in conventional and secure forms of employment. Despite the championing of labour flexibility through the utilisation of owned but idle assets, Wood and Lehdonvirta argue that there is still a form of 'structural antagonism' embedded in the e-hailing sector, particularly in Uber's business model.

'Structured antagonism' is a term that refers to the tension typical of a relationship between employee and managerial structures which generally results in collective action. Wood and Lehdonvirta explain that evidence of structured antagonism manifests itself through grievances such as platform commission, tariff rates and a sense of lack of voice expressed by drivers working on e-hailing platforms.

Global experiences suggest that identifying drivers as partners diminishes their bargaining power and de-legitimises attempts for collective action against e-hailing platforms. Two major legal frameworks serve as barriers for drivers to organise and justify engaging in collective action. These are freedom of association and competition laws.

Firstly, drivers sign contracts on e-hailing platforms as partners which mean that entering work-related associations is prohibited. Secondly, as suggested in earlier sections, regulatory ambiguity enables e-hailing platforms to classify themselves as 'technology companies' rather than transport services, making it difficult to accuse them of cartel behaviour. The reality is Uber has a monopoly as a supplier of technology that fulfils a demand in the transport industry, owing to rapid expansion strategies described in the first section.

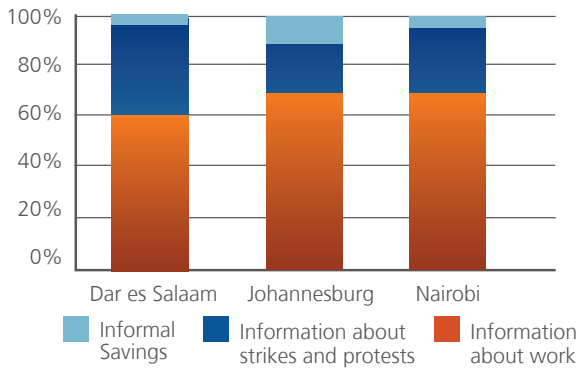
This monopoly undermines the bargaining power drivers have and eliminates any partnership they claim to offer drivers. It also positions drivers in a precarious situation because they function in an open market and the risk of the business is predominantly on them in this so-called partnership. However, despite these challenges, drivers in the three cities have demonstrated agency and stubbornly formed unions as well as found other creative ways to connect in this isolating shared economy.

5.2 STRATEGIES USED IN DRIVER ORGANISING

Across all three cities, the most popular form of organising has been outside union structures. Drivers predominantly use social media to connect in this geographically isolating field of work. WhatsApp group chats were the most preferred in all cities, followed by Facebook. A small percentage also expressed that they would meet physically

at common parking spaces when waiting for requests from clients (ibid). Nairobi had, at 44%, the greatest percentage of drivers who were on a WhatsApp group for drivers, with a majority of 46,9% being on three group chats. Across all three cities, drivers stated that the main purpose for these social media groups was to share work-related information and the less significant function was for informal savings. In Dar es Salam discussions around strike action and protests are more prevalent with 31,1% of the drivers interviewed expressing this function of the WhatsApp group. Compared to this, in Nairobi only 20,3%, the least from the cities researched, expressed discussions related to strike action on the group.

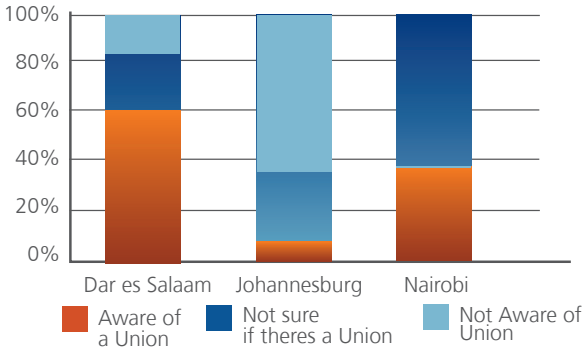
Figure 12: Primary function of driver WhatsApp Groups per city



The data illustrates in all three cities that the majority of drivers are not connected to each other, which serves as a challenge that will be discussed later. It also demonstrates that there is minimal discussions of strike action and rather more conversation on supporting one another through the often-difficult working conditions. In addition, the data illustrates that there are complex and at times incongruent attitudes towards organising through more conventional union structures.

Most drivers in Johannesburg and Nairobi indicated that they were not aware of any union for drivers. In contrast, Dar es Salaam saw a larger portion of drivers who were aware of unions for drivers.

Figure 13: Union awareness among drivers



However, membership in all three cities was found to be extremely limited. Of the small portion who had membership, the most popular structures were Tanzania Online Drivers Association (TODA) in Dar es Salaam, Digital Partners Association of Kenya (DPAK) in Nairobi and the Movement in Johannesburg.

56% of drivers in Dar es Salaam were aware that unions existed for drivers. In contrast, only 7% of drivers in Johannesburg knew that there were unions established for this specific type of work. An inference would suggest that there is a need to make these unions more visible for drivers. A respondent from Dar es Salaam explained why such a large proportion of drivers were aware of unions in the city:

"Toda existed in the past two years but it was not in so much awareness as it is now, it began to be well-known august last year when we went on uber and taxify strikes, there is where we got known widely and many other drivers joined the strike… so we are now official as an online drivers association."

Securing membership on TODA requires a driver to pay an entrance fee and monthly membership fees. After three months of membership, drivers qualify for credit assistance in buying a car and financial support for the death of an immediate family member. Benefits also include being bailed out of jail if something happened on the job. The union at the time of the interviews in 2019

was working on securing a health insurance package for drivers. In conjunction with these services rendered to member drivers, the union facilitates two major general meetings in June and December. The union elects eight leaders on a volunteer basis with a chairperson voted in every 4 years.

While it is clear union structures in the sector are still in their infancy, especially in Johannesburg and Nairobi, these unions could be unique places to cater to the structural and tacit needs, concerns and challenges experienced by drivers.

5.3 KEY MILESTONES: ATTEMPTS AND SUCCESSES

5.3.1 Attempts to strike by drivers

As the previous sections have suggested, drivers often experience precarious circumstances and working conditions once given entry into work.

This is especially acute when the initial allure of flexibility and independence is eroded due to the restrictions and challenges associated with a lack of asset ownership, financial obligations, increasing working hours and declining incomes. In unpacking the rationale behind attempts to strike, a participant in Dar es Salaam explained;

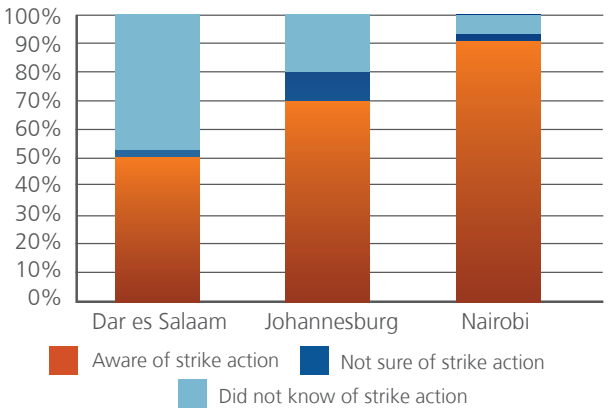
"We don't mean to stop uber but we intend to teach them a certain standard of mutual respect with the drivers, the driver to benefit so as the company, we love uber, we love them to remain."

According to Tassinari and Maccarrone, drivers generally have to overcome the individualising nature of work on the digital platform, with many doing so through connecting and sharing grievances through private groups on social media platforms, ultimately developing a mutual feeling of frustration. It is from that basis that solidarity can be nurtured and strategies for collective action developed and executed with a common tactic being mass logging off by drivers. Other strategies include gathering and boycotting in public spaces to garner media attention and the public's support and in some contexts the attention of other more established unions.

The below graph illustrates that in Johannesburg and Nairobi most drivers are aware of strike action. However, in Dar es Salaam those aware of such activities are in the minority. To offer some context, the survey results showed that in Dar es Salaam drivers knew of two strikes, in Johannesburg drivers knew of three strikes and in Nairobi they knew of four strikes.

A correlation can be made that the increase in the number of strikes results in more awareness of such modes of collective action.

Figure 14: Strike awareness among drivers



In Johannesburg and Nairobi, most drivers were not aware of who organises their colleagues to strike. This makes for an interesting discussion when data for union awareness and strike awareness are accessed together. Although the minority of drivers In Dar es Salaam were aware of strike action, most of them claimed that it was the unions who were responsible for mobilising drivers.

In Johannesburg, just under 70% of drivers were aware of strike action, however, none of them knew who organised their last strike. In Nairobi, almost all drivers were aware

of strike action but the majority of them were unaware of who organised their last strike.

This information demonstrates that there is a significant need for connecting drivers through more formal channels to create awareness around strike activity, particularly in Dar es Salaam. Similarly, there is a significant need, too, to create awareness and visibility for striker organisers to drivers in Johannesburg.

Some key strategies that were implemented across all three cities, as explained, were mass logoffs from the application. In Johannesburg, drivers mentioned gathering at public spaces such as Zoo Lake, and in Dar es Salaam drivers parked at Leaders Club. This gave their plight visibility to the public and caught media attention. In Nairobi, a boycott in 2018 received coverage on the BBC according to one participant. In Dar es Salaam, drivers provided Uber with a 24-hour warning before striking.

In addition, drivers in this city collaborated with the government to deliberate on fare prices for involved stakeholders. In Nairobi, drivers appeared to be more intentional in drawing from lessons from strikes by drivers overseas. Different unions and independent drivers gathered and put aside their differences to effectively address their grievances with Uber.

Subsequently, their concerns have been elevated to the Country's senate, with engagement by all the relevant government ministries. A local e-hailing application called Little Cab also collaborated with drivers on foreign-owned apps, with Little Cab paying TODA to run roadshows that market their services, thus facilitating a mutual agreement of support between the company and union.

5.3.2 Compromises made by drivers in strike action

Drivers have attempted to strike at least two times in each of the three cities. Their grievances were predominately about the working conditions. The top two expressed in each city being the tariff rates charged per kilometre and the commission that Uber was charging drivers per trip. According to the data collected drivers had to pay a commission that ranged from 20%-25% on the Uber app and 15%-20% on the Bolt App. Drivers that registered with Uber before 2017 were charged 20% commission while those that joined after were charged 25% commission.

"These two companies don't own any vehicles, they only give us the app and charge 25% commission and give customers extreme discounts, for example, a trip of kshs 500 and a client gets a kshs 250 discount and we have fixed upfront prices. It is wrong. "
Kenyan respondent

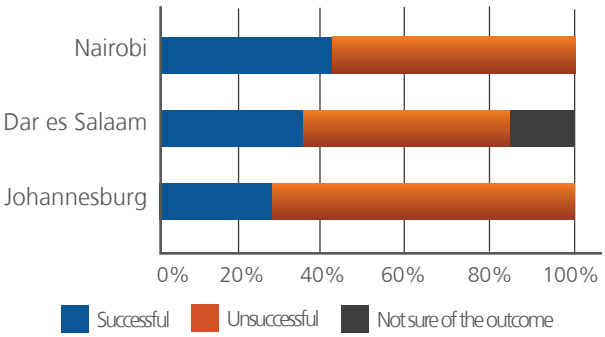
Uber was able to create a competitive advantage by charging lower tariffs per kilometre on the market. However, this has had negative implications on their drivers especially during fluctuating fuel prices and violent competition with metered taxi drivers. Two drivers from Johannesburg explained the impacts:

"…Yeah, it shows that it's R7.50 a kilometre so no wonder these meter taxis are fighting us so much because meter taxis are used to charge, uhm, R14 a kilometre." *South African Respondent*

"So, we are striking and saying, 'No, the fuel is too much for us and your rand per kilometre is very low, it can't balance the fuel and the living conditions.' So, we were toyi-toying about that." *South African Respondent*

The diagram below illustrates that drivers' perceptions regarding the success of the last strike in Dar es Salaam and Johannesburg is still very low however in Nairobi most drivers felt that their last strike was successful.

Figure 15: Outcome of the last strike



Minor successes were expressed that indicated support from Uber, such as security improvements in all three cities. Uber also offered drivers bonuses. In Dar es Salaam commission was expressed as a grievance in the first strike and the second it was not addressed, rather deactivation from the application became a greater concern. A participant in Nairobi stated that a security SOS button was installed on the application for drivers.

Another participant from Johannesburg commented on the security measures stating that a private security company was dispatched at major hot-spot areas in Johannesburg. This same participant also explained that Uber created a group chat facilitated by a staff member from their offices where drivers could express their grievances after one of their strike actions.

As observed earlier, it is apparent that more strategies need to be developed that prioritise connecting drivers to each other and effectively communicating strike action.

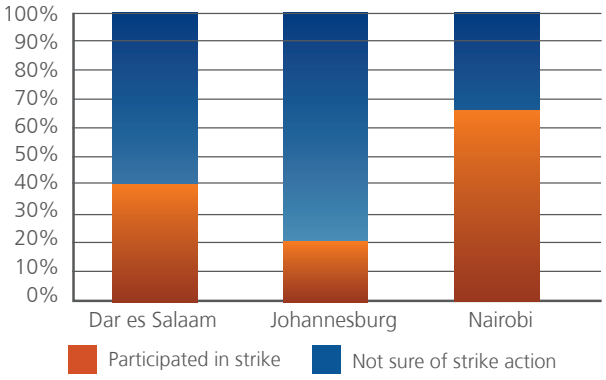
In addition, there is a need for greater visibility of those who mobilise the drivers and more pressure applied to negotiate better terms for major grievances such as commission rates and tariffs per kilometre which, to this point, remain largely unaddressed.

5.4 HURDLES AHEAD: CRITICAL STEPS

5.4.1 Pressing challenges

There is still a great deal of effort needed to organise drivers to foster solidarity and to maximise their bargaining power when challenging digital platform based companies for better working conditions. Solidarity is described as a shared sense of collective awareness of purpose, shared interests and frustrations, and more so a collective willingness to take relevant action towards shared issues. These platforms, however, have not been docile to such activities and have rather been known to give out bonuses to drivers in the hopes of defusing protests.

Figure 16: Driver participation in last strike action



In Johannesburg, a small percentage of drivers participated in strike action. The most consistent issue of non-participation was due to it being a potential risk to the car and perceived as a waste of time. In Nairobi, most drivers participated in strike action with those choosing not to be discouraged by specific issues such as lack of government support and disunity among drivers. In Dar es Salaam the first strike had a large portion of drivers participating, however, a decline in participation was observed in the second strike. Challenges common to both strikes in Dar es Salaam were fear of deactivation and disagreeing with

the motivations of the strike. Drivers in each of the three cities who did not participate in the most recent strikes in their cities stated that losing income was a grave concern. This was encapsulated by a participant in Nairobi that explained, "We can't strike again and stop working because we are poor and have nothing else to do."

In Dar es Salaam, some drivers continued to work. A participant exclaimed that those who own their cars compromise the efforts of those who do not own cars trying to organise for better working conditions.

As stated in previous sections, drivers have different financial capacities, which determine how long they can continue participating in protests – a factor that was expressed as a point of frustration and disunity among drivers. This often led to frustration and violence among drivers, resulting in some drivers refusing to participate in strike action in Johannesburg.

As explained in the previous section, the formation of unions has been productive in certain instances. However, Uber has found various ways to dismantle these associations, according to drivers. In Dar es Salaam union leaders are said to receive bribes from Uber to defuse strike action and stall on pushing for issues to get addressed. In Nairobi, one respondent explained the extent of corruption as a barrier to effective organising;

"Corruption has been experienced as these apps bribe these leaders to tone down. The leaders need training from different organisations on the know-how to tackle issues and brainstorm to the government because the government need people who know what they are bringing on the table"

The unity amongst drivers about who must participate in protests and how strikes should be conducted has been expressed as points of contention. In addition, there is a perceived lack of trust of leaders in the union structures. The belief among union members is that their leaders are bribed with large sums of money to slow down their collective action against platform companies.

5.4.2 Addressing the need for governmental support

As highlighted throughout this report, Uber entered each of the cities presenting itself as a technology for drivers to share their assets – cars – with peers. Framing drivers as partners, which is contentious, has made it difficult for governments to deal with issues that were presented to them by drivers. In Dar es Salaam and Nairobi efforts to pressure governments to regulate prices are still in process. In Nairobi demonstrations outside of Uber offices were interpreted as an obstruction to public services and dispersed by the police. In extreme cases, protesting drivers were fined or arrested. A pair of respondents in Nairobi explained;

"They pay a few people to intimidate us so that 20 cars are impounded both last year and this year most people were intimidated by being arrested. What we see is contrary to the laws of kenya. Some money is being used because if you say you are boycotting and you are arrested on charges of creating nuisance but on the other hand you are protected by the public order act to picket and to agitate and advocate for our rights..."

And:

"… The challenge the government is facing, I am quoting from the way we were described in the last Senate meeting we had about a month ago from a senior government official was 'we are a hot potato that no one wants to touch."

Considering these challenges, governments must engage drivers more actively and understand the contradictory nature of their jobs. However, holding governments accountable for protecting the rights of workers is an issue that has persisted for decades in African countries.

5.4.3 Addressing outstanding issues from UBER

Despite strike action, Uber has not addressed major grievances that drivers have continued to express, mainly around commission and tariffs per kilometre. According to respondents, Uber typically responds to drivers who are reported to have been in strikes by deactivating or blocking their accounts. A respondent in Dar es Salaam explained;

"What i have discovered since uber expanded and are still expanding, they have been bulls, they decide anytime to lower rates, offer promotions etc. As they want regardless, they hurt the drivers."

Drivers generally explained that Uber needed to be aware of the numerous challenges that drivers experience and be willing to reform their contract terms.

5.5 CONCLUSION

The regulatory ambiguity of the Uber platform has made it increasingly difficult for drivers working with the platform to organise and bargain for better working conditions. Despite these challenges, drivers have found creative ways to connect through social media, with WhatsApp being the most popular choice. Participants stated that they use social media predominantly to discuss work-related information.

There were limited conversations observed around strike and protest action. Generally, a very small proportion of drivers in Johannesburg and Nairobi were aware that there existed unions for drivers. Only in Dar es Salaam were the majority of drivers aware of a union for drivers. However, membership is still very limited in all three cities.

There were several attempts to protest exploitative gig practices across all three cities. The data showed that the more strike activities conducted in each city, the more awareness there was of collective action amongst drivers. This was illustrated by Nairobi which had a total of four strikes recorded in the data and 95% of drivers stated that they were aware of strike activity. Tactics used to protest were mass logoffs, public demonstrations and solidarity from other local e-hailing applications.

Uber responded by improving security features on the application and dispatching private security at hot spots. Finally, more effort is needed in increasing driver solidarity. This is particularly challenging because of the historic nature of African precarity in which drivers' working conditions are embedded.

The lack of uniformity of drivers' financial statuses makes it difficult to effectively follow through with protest action. Lastly, although Uber had responded to drivers' minor grievances, drivers continue to exert pressure for major issues to be addressed.

THE LACK OF UNIFORMITY OF DRIVERS' FINANCIAL STATUSES MAKES IT DIFFICULT TO EFFECTIVELY FOLLOW THROUGH WITH PROTEST ACTION. LASTLY, ALTHOUGH UBER HAD RESPONDED TO DRIVERS' MINOR GRIEVANCES, DRIVERS CONTINUE TO EXERT PRESSURE FOR MAJOR ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED.

6. TURNING THE CORNER: FORGING A WAY FORWARD

An inference that can be made, when considering the previous section, is that worker organisation and collective bargaining attempts among Uber drivers in the three cities in focus have had staggered and fragmented results. The challenges experienced by drivers will be attributed to two factors; extensive risk and low awareness.

The extensive risks associated with driver organisation attempts, as intimated in the previous section, include the potential loss of earnings, the threat of damage to vehicles, personal safety threats and ultimately, potential loss of income. The high risk associated with driver organisation attempts is a result of the diminishing employment relations described in previous sections, along with the regulatory ambiguity highlighted in the regulatory frameworks of the three cities of focus.

A lack of awareness contributes similarly to the inconsistent outcomes experienced by driver organisation attempts. Limited knowledge of strike action and similar collective bargaining attempts have significantly reduced the participation and solidarity given in these activities by drivers, ultimately decreasing the effectiveness of strike action. In addition, a general lack of awareness of the employment relations that are embedded in the gig economy, from the public, transport operators and governments has also contributed to the dire state of working conditions experienced by drivers.

The recommendations posited in this section, informed by critical work done by Hannah Johnston and Chris Land-Kalauskas at the International Labour Office, will include the establishment of worker cooperatives, worker centres and driver forums aimed and focused on potentially de-risking and creating awareness around collective action.

However, a buttressing recommendation will be made that calls for strengthening the regulatory frameworks that govern transport in the region, echoing the calls made within the global context.

6.1 REGULATORY REFORM

Regulatory frameworks play a critical role in framing the employment relations predominant in any sector of a functioning economy. Regulatory mechanisms are critical in ensuring equal and mutually-beneficial relationships between employers and the actors, workers or partners that drive operations and generate revenue. In the case of UBER, the lack of credible and explicit regulations for e-hailing operators in all three cities has proven to place drivers at risk of exploitation and negative earnings by excluding drivers from the basic social security safety nets and health and safety mechanisms granted to workers in other industries.

This exclusion, caused by the misclassification of drivers as independent contractors, has created an environment where uber drivers fall prey to arbitrary changes in performance evaluation, deactivation from their platforms and personal safety risks from competitors.

Any potential pathway to effective organising against this corrosive working environment endured by drivers has to start with meaningful regulation of e-hailing operators globally.

While there have been key breakthroughs seen in South Africa, California and France, local court cases between Uber drivers and the regional offices of the e-hailing service have done little to facilitate a broader systemic change in the manner in which UBER drivers are classified.

Creating a regulatory framework that takes into account the changing employment relations of the world and the influence of technology on work is a key step in building just and fair employment relations for UBER drivers and indeed workers within the broader gig economy.

6.2 WORKER COOPERATIVES

The previous sections illustrate that drivers have formulated two mechanisms in organising themselves. The first is through WhatsApp group chats and the second through driver unions and associations. While these have seen scattered returns, there have been chronic issues around limited conversations on collective action against Uber and limited membership, respectively. A potential mechanism to encourage effective collective solidarity is through driver-worker cooperatives.

Taking into account the significant challenge of fractured interest among drivers, worker cooperatives offer a space where anyone, either invested in e-hailing through labour or a vehicle, can join into a formalised collective. Cooperatives are useful entities that pool resources and offer service support for job expenses such as data, airtime as well as implementing strategies that cushion drivers from erratic fuel hikes. In addition, cooperatives can use raised capital, from membership fees as an example, to provide a minimum social security net, helping to de-risk work.

Over and above the pooling of monetary resources, cooperatives are also useful in forming a collective articulation of the plight of e-hailing drivers in the African context, with an improved and unified approach to pressing for improved terms and conditions from regulators and platform entities, like Uber. Public awareness, as an additional constraint to recognising driver precarity, can also be addressed by cooperatives through active and robust communication campaigns on traditional and social media.

Worker cooperatives therefore offer a productive option for both drivers and car owners, as two stakeholders with distinct and unique needs, in pooling the resources required to ease the financial burdens and lack of awareness around e-hailing work.

6.3 WORKER CENTRES

An additional mechanism that would assist in both de-risking and creating awareness around collective action would be in the form of worker centres. As a divergence from unions, worker centres are institutions that offer individual support services while considering the macro issues ubiquitous to gig economy work.

With a proliferation mainly in the United States, worker centres operate within designated jurisdictions and geographies to provide bespoke and context-specific social services and labour resources to wage earners in a multitude of sectors, including the gig economy . Worker centres are especially effective in assisting workers in non-standard forms of employment.

Considering the challenges identified in the previous section, such as declining income, insecure work, limited labour market mobility and unsafe conditions, worker centres can be a critical platform in engaging with key stakeholders involved in the e-hailing value chain, along with dispensing critical skills development initiatives that improve the labour market mobility of drivers.

Worker centres differ from cooperatives in the sense that these institutions bring together a variety of interventions that are aimed at bolstering drivers' material situations through awareness, transferral of skills and critical alliances formed with strategic partners.

6.4 ONLINE FORUMS

The previous sections of this report have shone a spotlight not only on the material conditions of drivers but also on the challenges associated with working in dispersed and isolated environments that hamper attempts to challenge those material conditions.

A potential mechanism to address and assist these challenges is the creation of online worker forums that assist drivers in tackling the pervasive environments they

operate in. These online forums, which can take the shape of app-based information and concern logging boards, could enable drivers to use a rating system of their own to rate both the clients, driver owners and geographies they drive-in.

These ratings can assist drivers in generating a feedback repository that can be used in stakeholder engagements and grievances with regulators, government, vehicle owners and e-hailing services.

In addition, intermittent rating of physical geographies could enable the creation of intelligence around potentially unsafe, high-risk zones for drivers, enabling them to make more informed decisions about where they opt to operate. This driver forum, which could be operated by an independent administrator, could charge a minimal subscription fee that would allow for the pooling of resources to assist in the pervasive material conditions experienced by drivers.

For example, the forums could have specific 'data funds' for the disbursement of cell phone data and 'maintenance funds' for the disbursement of critical funds associated with vehicle maintenance.

If these forums scale their memberships, strategic alliances can be formed with banking institutions and vehicle dealers in negotiating for favourable vehicle finance terms, increasing the vehicle ownership of drivers and establishing more autonomy in their work.

6.5 CONCLUSION

While the challenges facing e-hailing drivers are vast and ever-changing, the opportunity to define approaches that are aligned to this changing environment is critical.

Worker cooperatives, centres and forums are just a handful of the myriad of different ways that Uber drivers can pool resources and interests to advocate and strategically plan for improved working environments. The fundamental challenge is around the high risk and low awareness of the plight of Uber drivers, and therefore collective action should be at the forefront of any policy-making and regulatory interventions instituted by critical stakeholders in the ride-sharing arena.

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