

# BETWEEN REGULATION AND INFORMALITY

## The Inner Workings of Boda Boda Associations in Greater Kampala





# **BETWEEN REGULATION AND INFORMALITY**

THE INNER WORKINGS OF BODA BODA ASSOCIATIONS  
IN GREATER KAMPALA

**Dr. Paul Isolo Mukwaya**

**Mr. Peter Kasaija**

**Ms. Judith Mbabazi**

**Ms. Teddy Kisembo**

**Ms. Ritah Nakanjako**

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Copy Editor: **Will Boase**  
Design: **Ivan Barigye**  
Photos: **Katumba Badru Sultan, Philip Peter Kairu** and **Yoti Gilbert Giyo**  
General Editing: **John Bosco Mubiru**

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## FOREWORD

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The Amalgamated Transport and General Workers (ATGWU) has been at the forefront of organising informal transport workers, including those in the boda boda industry, since 2012. ATGWU believes that informal transport workers need the organisational experience of the trade union, while the union also need the vast number of informal transport workers to join and bring the power of their labour with them. With the power derived from such collectivism the union seeks to support respect for the rule of law/institutionalisation, respect for union rights, well-organised labour organisations and more concessions for working people on larger macroeconomic issues.

Over these years, we at ATGWU have realised that the challenge of organising Kampala's informal transport workers goes beyond addressing the direct employer–employee relationship. We believe that to effectively organise informal transport workers, particularly in the boda boda industry, both ATGWU and the informal transport workers need a good understanding of the social capital and welfare benefits embodied within the boda boda industry in Kampala.

The Greater Kampala Metropolitan Area (GKMA) has seen a rapid increase in the operations of motorcycle taxis, colloquially known as boda bodas. These motorbikes bridge the plethora of mobility gaps that exist in contexts like Kampala and which disproportionately affect the urban poor- a phenomenon that hints at the bedrock issues of transport inequity which are present in most cities of the global south. The industry is also a significant economic force, considered to be the second largest employer of young people not only in Kampala but across Uganda. And while boda bodas are indispensable due to their abilities of navigating traffic jams and accessing remote locations to deliver passengers and goods to their destinations in time and affordably, the industry remains largely unregulated and is associated with insecurity and safety issues for riders and passengers.

But while it might seem unstructured to outsiders, the industry is surprisingly self-sufficient. Boda boda operators already organise themselves into informal-formal groups (known as stages) and associations, many of which are fully registered with the authorities. Stages and associations create daily, weekly or monthly savings structures with the objective of alleviating poverty as individuals and as collectives by encouraging members to save and invest. The boda boda associations also provide social safety nets for their members, whose individual circumstances are often threatened given the precarious nature of informal sector employment. In addition, the associations secure social capital by mobilising resources for their members' welfare ranging from lines of financial credit and loan services, to health insurance and psychological support. Understanding such motivations behind riders' registration and belonging to these various association is critical if we, as labour unionists, are to re-organise and improve the boda boda industry in Kampala.

This study is an attempt to understand not just the role the boda boda industry plays in the transport economy, but also the processes of informal organisation, the challenges such initiatives face, and the potential they provide for safe and inclusive cities as pathways to integrated mobility planning and inclusive transport policy.

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**John Mark Mwanika**

**PROGRAM OFFICER**

**AMALGAMATED TRANSPORT AND GENERAL WORKERS UNION**

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## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

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<b>ATGWU</b>	Amalgamated Transport and General Workers Union	<b>MoH</b>	Ministry of Health
<b>BOMOSH</b>	Bonna Mobile Shield	<b>MoTIC</b>	Ministry of Trade, Industry and Cooperatives
<b>CCTV</b>	Closed Circuit Television	<b>MoWT</b>	Ministry of Works and Transport
<b>CEBMA</b>	Century Boda Boda Motorcycle Association	<b>MSMEs</b>	Micro, Small and Medium Sized Enterprises
<b>COVID-19</b>	Coronavirus Disease	<b>NDP</b>	National Development Plan
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product	<b>NGOs</b>	Non-Governmental Organisations
<b>CMI</b>	Chieftaincy of Military Intelligence	<b>NMT</b>	Non-Motorised Transport
<b>GKMA</b>	Greater Kampala Metropolitan Area	<b>NRM</b>	National Resistance Movement
<b>FES</b>	Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung	<b>NSDF</b>	National Slum Dwellers' Federation
<b>FGDs</b>	Focused Group Discussions	<b>PSV</b>	Passenger Service Vehicle
<b>ICT</b>	Information and Communication Technology	<b>SACCOs</b>	Savings and Credit Cooperative Organisations
<b>ISO</b>	Internal Security Organisation	<b>UBOS</b>	Uganda Bureau of Statistics
<b>KAMBE</b>	Kampala Metropolitan Boda Boda Entrepreneurs	<b>UGAFODE</b>	UGAFODE MicroFinance Limited
<b>KCCA</b>	Kampala City Council	<b>UGX</b>	Ugandan Shilling
<b>KCCA</b>	Kampala Capital City Authority	<b>UNCDF</b>	United Nations Capital Development Fund
<b>KOTSA</b>	Kampala Operational Taxi Stages Association	<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>KUBOCA</b>	Kampala Union Boda Boda Cyclist Association	<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>LC</b>	Local Council	<b>UPDF</b>	Uganda's People Defence Forces
<b>LDU</b>	Local Defence Unit	<b>UPF</b>	Uganda Police Force
<b>LG</b>	Local Government	<b>URA</b>	Uganda Revenue Authority
<b>MDA</b>	Ministries, Departments and Agencies	<b>UTODA</b>	Uganda Taxi Operators and Drivers Association
<b>MIA</b>	Ministry of Internal Affairs	<b>UTRAD</b>	Uganda Transport Development Agency
<b>MoGLSD</b>	Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development	<b>WB</b>	World Bank

## AN EDITOR'S NOTE

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The term “boda boda”, which as we will see claims to derive from the border-hopping past of two-wheeled smugglers and presently describes the motorcycle-taxi industry, is not in popular usage outside of East Africa. However, within the region, and particularly in Uganda, it is a very specific term and carries with it all of the chaos and vibrance of an industry which cannot easily be otherwise explained. It is a flexible word, usually working as a noun but sometimes as a verb, and it is more commonly spoken than written. It also serves as a modifier for other words- every resident has their “boda guy”, a person may “boda” to a party or back from the market, and the “boda stage” is often the logistical heart of the neighbourhood. It can also refer to the motorcycle itself, or its rider, or both at once. Throughout this report you will see the term used in different ways, and “boda boda” used interchangeably with just “boda”. This linguistic vagary is not an error but instead a fair reflection of the term’s ordinary usage in everyday speech and language.

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**Dr. Paul Isolo Mukwaya**

**TEAM LEADER**



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Boda bodas have become a prominent and popular stopgap mode of transportation. They are cheap, efficient, convenient, flexible, affordable, fast and efficient, and they are able to bypass traffic congestion and overcome poor road surfaces. Dangerous as they may be, bodas serve a public need created by poor governmental planning of transit systems. Boda bodas are known for their relatively low cost, responsiveness and manoeuvrability, and they can easily travel dirt roads too rough, remote or steep for cars. Despite hazards, the accessibility and practicality of boda services have made it a popular transport option among Uganda's population. It enables first and last mile connectivity and integrates hard-to-reach places into the main economy.

In popular consciousness the boda boda industry has long been known for the wrong reasons. The riders represent a prominent embodiment of the lawlessness of day-to-day life in Uganda. They are considered rowdy, messy, disorderly, criminal, impatient and dangerous, and are often blamed for accidents. One writer refers to the industry instead as an "epidemic", suggesting that what appears to be a worthwhile service and a handy source of income for many young peoples is in fact a deadly and culturally-destructive activity. Boda bodas are the riskiest option for commuting, and are popularly regarded as the embodiment of personal and public safety and security risks. They frequently disregard the rules of the road, which causes harm to other operators, passengers, other road users and citizens, and the boda boda's relative anonymity has made it the vehicle of choice for many criminals.

However, these motorbikes are also indispensable. Besides acting as tools for navigating chokeholds of traffic, boda bodas have become critical in the delivery of supplies and parcels for both homes and businesses in urban areas. Anecdotal and empirical evidence suggests that motorcycle taxis contribute substantially, both directly and indirectly, to the urban economy. They offer jobs to unemployed young people while also opening up space for a range of economic opportunities via forward and backward linkages. They are therefore a significant source of urban livelihoods. Assuming each driver or related-industry worker supports a partner and child, we can approximate that around 750,000 people, or 25% of the population of the GKMA, directly depend on the industry for income. More recently, bodas have become a key component in the digitalisation of the urban economy, which is drastically changing the transport system. Numerous digital-based ride-sharing platforms, including Taxify (now rebranded as Bolt), SafeBoda, Uber and Mondo-ride among others, have impacted on urban mobility by linking boda boda riders to customers via internet-enabled smartphone applications.

This study examines the processes of organisation and operation of motorcycle taxi (boda-boda) associations in the Greater Kampala Metropolitan Area (GKMA), to try to understand more about why riders join such associations



Despite hazards, the accessibility and practicality of boda services have made it a popular transport option among Uganda's population.

and what effect membership can have. It also examines the organisational outcomes of motorcycle taxis (boda-boda) associations, what (de)motivates boda-boda operators to become members of associations and how they build social capital and other benefits for their members. By discussing the inter- and intra- cooperative arrangements among boda-boda associations and how these influence access to social capital and other welfare dividends by members it will also suggest ways in which the welfare outcomes of associations and unions can endure and become resilient in the face of growing operational challenges and risks in the city region. Additionally, it maps gender expressions, attitudes and practices (beyond the binary) within the boda boda industry and how they influence the management of boda boda associations in the GKMA.

All of the information collected is then used to generate practical and implementable recommendations (disaggregated into short-, medium- and long-term) that ATGWU and its partners can explore and adopt towards addressing major challenges around the organisation and mobilisation of boda boda riders into a cohesive group to contribute to broader transport policy decision-making. In addition, the report provides technical and policy support to the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and Paratransit Consultative Forum on modalities for the inclusion of motorcycle taxi (boda-boda) associations in consultative forums, based on their local needs, capacities and priorities. It also provides essential learning for building the capacity of the Amalgamated Transport and General Workers Union (ATGWU) and city authorities to mobilise and engage effectively with their constituencies, but also to prepare participatory and inclusive programmes for members that are consistent with collective urban development paths.

A mixed methodology entailing quantitative and qualitative approaches was adopted to generate the relevant data, information and other in-depth perspectives from different actors. This enabled the establishment of a reliable and credible base for analysing how boda boda groups mobilise, organise and are maintained, in addition to how these groups network/interact with each other in the GKMA.

The study team, in close collaboration with ATGWU and FES, selected boda boda associations in Kampala and surrounding municipalities with an emphasis on examining how operators mobilise and organise themselves to advance their collective interests. This involved a critical assessment of the motivations behind enrolment of operators into associations, how these associations are run on a day-to-day basis, identification of the challenges and constraints they face as well as the potential opportunities they present to inform strategies for forming more cohesive and effective units to represent the aspirations of their members. These were supplemented by synthesis of both published and grey literature to unpack the working arrangements behind these associations. Critical attention was also given to the gender dynamics that prevail within these spaces to provide valuable insights into the extent to which these entities are inclusive or exclusive, as well as the degree of sensitivity to gender issues.

## MAIN FINDINGS

- 1** The estimated national vehicle fleet including motorcycles has more than doubled over the period of National Development Plan (NDP) 1, from 635,657 vehicles in 2010 to 1,383,878 vehicles in 2015. It was projected to grow to over two million by end of NDP2 period (2020). The majority of this growth was registered in the motorcycle category. Data from Uganda Revenue Authority (URA) indicates that motorcycles have dominated new vehicle registrations, at 72% per year from 2015 to 2019.
- 2** Boda boda taxis started in the early 1990s, but collective associations only started to emerge almost a decade later in the early 2000s. During 2004 – 2019 boda boda associations were only created at city division and national levels. Since then this has been followed by a rapid rise in the number of boda boda associations. In response to the politicisation of their sub-sector, different groups started to mobilise riders out of necessity, primarily to form savings groups and to provide socio-material support to members, in addition to representing their interests. These groups range in scale from the local, with less than 100 members and whose reach is often limited to individual boda stages, to large-scale associations whose membership covers the whole city and beyond and who boast enrolment of more than 100,000 members in some cases.
- 3** The boda boda industry is largely self-regulating through two distinct modes:
  - a) Formally organised and registered groups. Our finding showed that there exist about 84 boda boda associations formally registered by KCCA, mostly operating in the Greater Kampala Metropolitan Region.
  - b) Informally organised committees, typically associated with a boda boda stage, which have been allowed to operate because of the exigencies of the boda boda industry.
- 4** Every boda boda rider's dream appears to be owning their own motorcycle. Individual ownership ensures financial stability, safety and job security. But individual ownership of motorcycles is not always a straightforward path. There are four main paths to ownership- sale of property (including land), borrowing money within the rider's social network, Kibaluwa/Ekisanja, and lease-to-own or asset financing. To facilitate and support riders to acquire their own motorcycles, several agencies across the GKMA have started schemes whose sole purpose is to empower boda boda riders and provide a path towards ownership of motorcycles. (Please see also chapter 2.1.1, for details).
- 5** Boda boda associations have, over time, evolved complex structures which transcend mere associations between groups of the same social background. There are two basic form of working arrangements that exist between and among boda boda associations. With the risk of overlap, we categorise them into two:
  - a) **Intra-association arrangements:** Highly personalised power geometries, hierarchical configuration of individual associations.
  - b) **Inter-association arrangements:** Dominated by competition between/among associations following lines of political affiliation to 'godfathers'/patrons, rather than on cooperation and collaboration towards collective bargaining and negotiation.
- 6** Among most boda boda operators, there are a number of fears and uncertainties associated with:
  - (a) regulatory and enforcement arms of central and local governments
  - (b) rival boda boda association,
  - (c) roads users including passengers, criminal gangs and vehicle drivers;
  - (e) operational spaces; and
  - (f) politicians. These fears highlight two important messages related to planning, regulation and political challenges:

- a) It is unclear within the Boda boda industry on which agency is directly responsible for their operations across the Greater Kampala Metropolitan Area. Much as the Local Government Act 1997 (amended several times) provides that the local government manages the affairs of the transport sector in their jurisdiction, the boda boda industry has gradually become a transport, road safety and traffic concern, a planning challenge, an economic and health problem and a security nightmare. Addressing these challenges requires that all responsible agencies including but not limited to Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA), Uganda Police Force (UPF), Ministry of Health (MoH) and Ministry of Works and Transport (MoWT) coordinate their interventions to manage the sector. However, as we found out during our research, there is a lack of coordination among these agencies and they are often at loggerheads regarding how best the industry can be managed.
- b) Given the large number of players and interest groups present in the industry, boda boda associations have become important nodes in the highly competitive arena of urban politics. Boda Boda 2010 exemplified this more than any other group that has existed in the GKMA. It is widely believed that the association was a deliberate creation of the Uganda Police Force, and that they helped to organise its structures and even chose its leader, Abdullah Kitatta. He was previously the Chairman of the National Resistance Movement (NRM) for Rubaga Division and a police protégé, on top of being President Museveni's mobiliser in charge of boda bodas and taxis. Those close to Uganda's politics, and in particular internal NRM party politics, knew the Boda Boda 2010 founder as a prolific party mobiliser and one of the few common men with the President's ear. Given the impunity with which the group operated, there was a growing public feeling that Boda Boda 2010 was working for certain regime interests and probably enjoyed the unspoken protection of the then police chief. Kitatta and his group would turn up in numbers to quell opposition demonstrations and were known to control some of the city's gangs. In return, the police chief appeared to turn a blind eye to the group's illegal activities. The group was accused of meting out violence on real and perceived opponents of the ruling NRM government, attacking courts of law and rearresting acquitted persons or protesting the trials of their benefactors, enabling the regime to maintain a grip on their areas of influence.
- 7** Boda boda associations exhibit several kinds of organisational characteristics including:
- a) Acting as spaces for networking: boda bodas facilitate all manner of interactions or encounters for their members as they seek out possibilities and opportunities for upward mobility. Through these spaces of like-minded individuals, boda boda riders, most of whom have dependents, can access and rely on vital networks for socio-economic support to fulfil key obligations including but not limited to care, transport and education
- b) Acting as infrastructures of survival: boda bodas are a central means of economic and political survival for different groups. Thousands of disenfranchised boda riders, of whom the majority are part of the burgeoning young urban population with little access to gainful employment are now indirectly dependent on these associations to secure their livelihoods given the precarious environment they find themselves in. These infrastructures have become the lifeline or "spatial anchors" by which such groups in Kampala stake their claim and right to the city.
- c) Acting as networks of solidarity: boda boda associations act in part as an attempt in search of an identity, instil a sense belonging and also, to acquire a level of legitimacy. The need to find and interact with individuals who understand them and share similar struggles, challenges and goals has played a major role in motivating boda riders to join associations.

- d) Acting as nodes for political efficacy and participation: boda boda associations have become important nodes in the highly competitive arena of urban politics. Boda Boda 2010 is an example of this.
  - e) Acting as pathways for financial inclusion and empowerment of young peoples by providing much-needed informal employment for multitudes of Ugandan young peoples who are also members of the many boda boda associations operating in the GKMA.
- 8** Digital-based boda boda services have become widespread across the city. They are dominated by two operational modes:
- a) **App-based drivers:** These receive online trip requests everywhere around town. Some of them prefer to work full-time with the apps.
  - b) **Formally employed riders:** This is a third model for boda boda deliveries, and can be either app-based or non-app based and is a formal business model. Riders in this category are totally dependent on an employer who provides the rider with their motorcycle, accessories, fuel and maintenance,

and pays a monthly salary to the riders who use the motorcycles to carry out deliveries. The prime example is the restaurant chain Café Javas. which is very active in food e-commerce, providing branded motorcycles to their drivers who are well recognised across the metropolitan area.

- 9** While a significant amount of effort has been made to improve the boda boda industry in terms of safety, viability and organisation of players, it remains a male-dominated industry with very few women having the access or courage to venture in. Generally, the few women who have penetrated the boda industry in Kampala face many challenges ranging from outright discrimination to a refusal by passengers to pay, in addition to juggling the more traditional roles that society expects from them as mothers, wives and homemakers. For those involved in boda boda associations, the absence of fellow women in leadership positions has made it difficult to effectively represent their interests. There are currently no female-led boda associations. This was given as a possible cause for the lack of female boda riders, but more importantly it was also singled out as a probable cause of the limited presence of their gender-specific needs.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### SHORT TERM RECOMMENDATION

#### 1. Regulation from (in)formality

Based on its economic importance, it is recommended that the regularisation of the boda boda industry is urgent. A lot should be done regarding registration and licensing, training, and enforcement of traffic rules. The current state of (in)formality in which the boda boda associations operate should be handled appropriately by the relevant authorities including but not limited to the Inter-Ministerial and Agency Committee involving Kampala Capital City Authority and surrounding municipalities, Uganda Police and other security forces, the Ministries of Works and Transport, Security, Gender, Labor and Social Development, Internal Affairs,

amongst others. The boda boda associations must be empowered to play a critical role as sound, effective and independent actors/entities in urban decision-making processes, promoting the self-regulation of the industry and more importantly, genuinely representing the specific interests of their members.

#### a. Review existing transport policy and legislation

The city government needs to take a proactive stance by engaging with boda boda organizations and other actors such as the Ministry of Works and Transport, Ministry of Information and Communications Technology, and the Traffic Police

Directory of the Uganda Police Force to review existing legislation. The review would provide the platform for identifying deficits/gaps which can then be addressed with the development of bye-laws and supportive guidelines to ensure improved regulation of this transport sub-sector. These bye-laws and guidelines would be the basis upon which to mediate entry into and exit from the industry along with other pertinent related issues. There also is a need to consistently enforce the existing traffic and road safety rules without the compulsion exhibited by government agencies to always think about simply introducing new regulations in the sector.

- b. Registration of all boda boda riders:** There is a need to register all boda boda operators across the Greater Kampala Metropolitan Areas. This should culminate in a robust database that can be used for the proper management of the sector. The registration exercise should be guided by the existing laws such as the Local Government (Kampala City Council Maintenance of Law and Order) Ordinance 2006, the Traffic and Road Safety Act 1998, and the KCCA Act 2011, which provide for the management of traffic. The Amalgamated Transport and General Workers Union (ATGWU) should support KCCA and relevant government agencies in their attempts to register all boda boda riders across the metropolitan area.
- c. Training/skilling of all boda boda riders** to appreciate and respect traffic and road safety regulations. Boda boda riders often violate traffic regulations by carry multiple passengers, disregard

traffic signalization, encroach on pedestrian walkways, go against traffic flow streams (keeping left), among others. Traffic laws are poorly understood and selectively applied, leading to their devaluation.

## **2. Most boda boda riders operate at specific locations known as stages to wait and drop passengers.**

Although most of these stages are informal, they are self-organising with predefined leadership structures and a set of stage guidelines agreed between members to govern stage operations including rider behaviour and how to treat passengers. These existing forms of organizations at the stage need to be recognized by the city authority and other government agencies and they should be entry nodes/points for targeted interventions to better regulate the sector.

## **3. Attitudinal and mindset change of planning personnel**

Most government and planning officials only speak about the challenge with the boda boda industry when the latest accident figures are released, or when a major crime is committed by men riding motorcycles. Boda bodas might be ignored in mainstream economic development and planning policy discourses, but will remain important for as long there is no alternative safe, convenient, affordable and reliable public transport system across the metropolitan area. ATGWU should support KCCA and the relevant government agencies in influencing and designing interventions that are geared at attitudinal and mindset change of planning personnel.

## **MEDIUM TERM RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **4. The government should implement a tracking system for boda bodas to rein in unlawful behaviour.**

The use of remote digital applications and solutions provides a useful avenue for ensuring a satisfactory level of surveillance while ensuring the sector still retains an acceptable level of independence.

### **5. Digitalisation and ICT usage for boda boda operations**

While other professions may require years of training with no guarantee of a job for graduates, the low skills requirement of boda boda riding are matched by a high demand for their vital service. With this in mind, KCCA and related government agencies should not be fighting

to get rid of boda bodas but instead exploring avenues to integrate them into the urban transport system by exploiting digitalisation through relatively cheap technological applications and solutions including ride-hailing apps.

#### **6. All attempts at unionisation and mainstreaming of the boda boda**

industry should start with an elaborate boda boda register and database from which all attempts can then be made to effectively mobilize boda boda riders into

groups to improve regulation of the industry. ATGWU should lead this effort and support KCCA as the planning and regulatory agency to estimate the actual or relative contribution of the boda boda industry to the national economy including the actual numbers or multiplier effects of boda boda operations on the livelihoods of Ugandans. Moreover, the existing boda boda associations reveal that the operators have a desire to organize themselves so that their individual challenges could be tackled.

### **LONG TERM RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **7. Strategic planning to tackle externalities such as COVID-19.**

The pandemic presented not only a health crisis but also a humanitarian and development crisis that threatens to leave deep social, economic and political scars for years. It is therefore important to build the boda boda industry's capacity to harness the digital economy to expand e-commerce and participate productively in the e-commerce ecosystem. This will strengthen supply chains and enable business continuity, supporting livelihoods and enabling earlier recovery from the pandemic.

#### **8. Prioritising the concerns of female boda boda riders and paratransit service users**

Women working in the boda boda industry face a lack of opportunities for training and inadequate representation in boda boda associations, as well as facing violence and harassment from colleagues and passengers. These are issues of significant concern and the associations are not addressing them. ATGWU should support boda boda associations to formulate more inclusive strategies and action plans. Women's full economic and social contribution to the boda boda industry should be both recognised and documented. Estimates should be made of how much this could be enhanced by developing gender-responsive transport programmes and the need to promote a gender perspective and women's involvement in the boda boda industry.

#### **9. Incentivising female participation in the boda boda sector**

An enabling environment is essential for the inclusion of women as boda boda riders. This might be achieved by giving incentives, finance and adequate access to credit. The reasons for women's low participation in the boda boda industry can be classified as the timing and place of work, experiences of harassment and violence; and gender stereotyping, all of which prevent women from choosing to work in the boda boda industry and can mean women are made unwelcome when they do enter such work, therefore affecting their retention.

#### **10. Promoting greater female involvement in leadership in the boda boda industry.**

Additional support is required to enable women to break into the non-traditional roles that the paratransit sector presents, through measures such as ensuring access to training and promotion opportunities. This would involve directly tackling social norms that restrict women's involvement in the boda boda industry, including shifting attention to perpetrators of sexual harassment and increasing support for active bystander interventions. ATGWU should support boda boda association to focus on and build women's leadership in boda boda associations.



Boda Boda riders habitually driving on the wrong side of the road during rush hour. Photo by Yoti Gilbert Giyo.



# 1.0 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 BACKGROUND

According to the World Bank (2015), Uganda’s urban population is expected to hit 20 million by 2040, up from 6 million in 2013. But the country suffers from poorly connected cities and mobility constraints (Poon, 2016) where traditional forms of public transport are unaffordable to low income workers, many of whom live outside of the city they work in. In a country experiencing increasing urbanisation (The East African, 2016) where public transport is erratic and taxis are out of reach for many, informal systems of transport including but not limited to motor cycle taxis (known locally, and in this report, as boda bodas) have become an attractive option (Dahir, 2016; Nasasira, 2015). Paradoxically, this ubiquitous mode of transport is a necessity for many commuters since it fills a critical gap in public transport. Bodas are a bottom-up response to an unmet, incompressible mobility demand (Cherry, 2015), providing a temporary solution but often failing to obey control measures taken by public authorities (Jaligot, Kemajou and Chenal, 2017). The term “boda boda” (which is often shortened to just “boda”) is defined as “a type of motorcycle or bicycle with a space for a passenger or for carrying goods, often used as a taxi”<sup>1</sup>. The origins of the trade as it presently exists have been traced to the 1980s, according to Doherty (2017) and other scholars, though Evans et al (2018) date them back even further, to smugglers in the 1960s.

**Table 1: Modal Share in the Greater Kampala Metropolitan Region**

Existing situation	GKMA (2016)**	% of trips ***	% of passengers transported ***
Average speed (km/hr)	14.4		
Average no. of passengers (commuter taxis/matatus) per trip	13.4		
Average Taxi (commuter taxi) fill	84%		
Average transfer rate	2.2		
Average total (?) route length (km)	11		
Car (private) share	7.9%	37	9
Boda boda (motorcycle) share	10.1%	42	9
Public Transport (commuter taxi/matatu) share	41.0%	21	82
NMT share (dominated by walking)	39.3%		
Auto-rickshaw share	-		
Others	1.7%		

\*\* Byamukama (2018)    \*\*\* Musisi (2016)

1 <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/bodaboda>

There is a love-hate relationship between East Africa and its two-wheeled taxis (Poon, 2016). Since the introduction of the modern commuter boda boda in the mid-1990s, they have become an integral part of the culture, economy and transport landscape of the Greater Kampala Metropolitan Area (GKMA). They are also present all over the rest of Uganda and in other East African cities, but the industry, and consequently this report, centres on Kampala. Rising fuel prices and acute traffic congestion during peak hours along major roadways in the GKMA has rendered privately-run public transport options inefficient and opened up an opportunity for the boda bodas to exploit (Dolor, 2016; The East African, 2016). It is estimated that over 24,000 man-hours are lost in traffic jams each year, and the vehicle-hours lost each year are estimated at 26,000 in GKMA (Ngwomoya, 2019; Okumu, 2020).

Boda bodas have become a prominent and popular stopgap mode of transportation. They are cheap, efficient, convenient, flexible, affordable, fast and efficient, able to zoom through and snake between the daily traffic congestion and inadequate road networks of East African cities (Dolor, 2016; Mwesigwa, 2019; Poon, 2016; Russon, 2019; Evans, O'Brien and Ng, 2018; Ford, 2019; Olowogboyega, 2020). Dangerous as they may be, bodas serve a public need created by poor government planning of transit systems (Dahir, 2016; Dolor, 2016; Poon, 2016). Boda bodas are known for their relatively low cost, responsiveness and manoeuvrability, and they can easily travel dirt roads too rough, remote or steep for cars. Despite hazards, the accessibility and practicality of boda services have made it a popular transport option among Uganda's population. It enables first and last mile connectivity and integrates hard-to-reach places into the main economy (Courtright, et al., 2021; Mwesigwa, 2019). Speaking about the never-changing transport situation in the GKMA, Namale (2018) aptly writes:

There are those days when we all get anxious about getting to work late, failing to make it to a job interview in time, making it to crucial appointments, etc. In such circumstances, any concerned individual would definitely think of jumping onto any passing or random motorcycle.

Besides acting as tools for navigating choked traffic (Lukandwa, 2019; Wamboga, 2020), boda bodas have become critical for the delivery of supplies and parcels for both homes and businesses in urban areas (Kalinaki, 2021; Namale, 2018, Wamboga, 2020) and are also used as a means of commuting, albeit a risky one (Wamboga, 2020). In peri-urban and rural areas they double as ambulances and emergency tools (Mwesigwa, 2019; Wamboga, 2020). Urban passengers opt for boda bodas to avoid the daily frustrations inherent in taking other forms of public transportation, which include annoyances such as the use of fake taxi passengers (Wamboga, 2020) to perpetrate theft. These are some of the reasons that the boda fleet constitutes close to 10% of the modal share for the GKMA (Table 1). Meanwhile increased access to innovative financing (hire-purchase, microfinance etc.), a shift from importation to local assembly of bikes, and the availability of relatively cheap parts for maintenance, set alongside incremental improvements of the city's obsolete road infrastructure through support from the World Bank, have all played key roles in increasing the presence and popularity of this two-wheeled mode of transport in the GKMA.

Anecdotal and empirical evidence suggest that motorcycle taxis directly and indirectly contribute to the urban economy in the form of jobs for unemployed young people, while also opening up space for a range of forward- and backward-linked economic opportunities. Hence, they are a significant source of urban livelihoods. Assuming each driver or related-industry worker supports a partner and child, this suggests that around 750,000 citizens, or 25% of the population of the GKMA, directly depend on the industry for income (Evans, O'Brien and Ng, 2018). More recently bodas have also begun actively playing a role in the digitalisation of the urban economy, drastically changing the transport system. Numerous digital-based ride-sharing platforms, including Taxify (now renamed Bolt), Safeboda, Uber and Mondo-ride amongst others, have had impacts on urban mobility by linking boda boda riders to customers via internet-enabled smartphone applications (Mugume, 2019).

In popular consciousness the boda boda industry has long been known for the wrong reasons. The riders represent a prominent embodiment of the lawlessness of day-to-day life in Uganda. They are considered rowdy, messy, disorderly, criminal, impatient and dangerous, and are often blamed for accidents (Athumani, 2014; Ford, 2019; Iraki, 2020; Kalinaki, 2021; Lukandwa, 2019; Namale, 2018). Khisa (2021) refers to the industry instead as an “epidemic”, suggesting that what appears to be a worthwhile service and a handy source of income for many young peoples is in fact a deadly and culturally-destructive activity. Boda bodas are the riskiest option for commuting, and are popularly regarded as the embodiment of personal and public safety and security risks, given the high reported rates of accidents (Vaca et al, 2020; Munu, 2019; Raynor, 2014, Wanume et al., 2019), crime (Theuri and Mohammed, 2020; Kamusiime, 2019; Riko and Handa, 2019; NCRC, 2018) and disorder (Buwembo, 2018; Khisa, 2015). They frequently disregard the rules of the road, which causes harm to other operators, passengers, road users and citizens, (Ojewale, 2021; Athumani, 2014; Ford, 2019; Iraki, 2020; Ojewale, 2021).

The number of motorcycles in the city is a contested topic and the number of boda boda operators in the city remains unknown (Ngwomoya, 2020), in part because of the fluidity of participation and employment status within the boda industry (Obiga, 2017). The latest ‘KCCA Entambula Yaffe’ states that boda boda numbers increased from 15,979 in 2007 to 405,124 in 2014. Other estimates suggest between 300,000 and 800,000 boda bodas ply their trade in the GKMA alone (Athumani, 2014; Daily Monitor, 2013; Ford, 2019; Kigambo, 2017; Poon, 2016; Russon, 2019). It should be noted that more recent data collected by the World Resources Institute has yet to be published at the time of writing, but it is suggested that it indicates substantial further growth in the boda bodas’ share of the urban transport market. Projections indicate that as motorcycle manufacturers and assemblers seek to increase their presence on the continent, boda boda numbers will only increase over time in African cities like Kampala (The East African, 2016; Dahir, 2016).

Among the key drivers behind the emergence of the boda boda paratransit options in Uganda is the poorly connectivity of its cities and mobility constraints (Poon, 2016) where traditional forms of public transport are unaffordable to low income workers, many of whom live outside of the city they work in. Another driver of the boda boda paratransit is the issue of affordability. In a country experiencing increasing urbanisation (The East African, 2016) where public transport is erratic and taxis are out of reach for many, informal systems of transport including but not limited to motor cycle taxis (known locally, and in this report, as boda bodas) have become an attractive option (Dahir, 2016; Nasasira, 2015).

This ubiquitous mode of transport fills a critical gap in public transport. Since their introduction in the mid-1990s, they have become part of the culture, economy and transport landscape of the Greater Kampala Metropolitan Area (GKMA). Rising fuel prices and acute traffic congestion during peak hours in the GKMA has incapacitated privately-run public transport options, opening up an opportunity for the boda bodas (Dolor, 2016; The East African, 2016).

The emergence of various digital platforms has also contributed to the expansion of the boda boda industry in Kampala. Boda bodas are actively playing a role in the digitalisation of the urban economy through digital-based ride-sharing platforms and drastically altering the transport dynamics. On the other hand, boda bodas’ rapid expansion has been accompanied by a range of deepening problems and concerns, from public health and safety (Athumani, 2014; Ford, 2019; Iraki, 2020; Kalinaki, 2021; Lukandwa, 2019; Namale, 2018; Vaca et al, 2020; Munu, 2019; Raynor, 2014, Wanume et al., 2019), to links with criminal activity (Theuri and Mohammed, 2020; Kamusiime, 2019; Riko and Handa, 2019; NCRC, 2018). Popular narratives around bodas tend to exaggerate or sensationalise these, but at the core there are real issues that need confronting. There are also some considerable governance challenges here: there has been a lot of formal state neglect of the sector – alongside substantial levels of politicisation through more informal channels – and there are mounting calls for better regulation as the city continues to expand.

By far the most significant forms of public transport in the GKMA are minibus-taxis and boda-bodas, and the associations through which the two industries are organised constitute further key 'players'. Many (though certainly not all) of these associations are now affiliated with ATGWU. Both taxis and boda-bodas operate through a highly organised system of stages, with stage-level committees and Savings and Credit Co-operatives (SACCOs) playing a key role in shaping the GKMA's transport sector. In the taxi sector, Uganda Taxi Operators and Drivers Association (UTODA) dominated the scene until 2012 after which a range of new organisations emerged, the most significant being Kampala Operational Taxi Stages Association (KOTSA) and Uganda Transport Development Agency (UTRADA). The boda-boda sector has never formed a centralised collective organisation equivalent to UTODA and has always been more fragmented, though for a period of time a highly-politicised organisation called Boda Boda 2010 achieved a relatively high level of membership and control (often violently enforced). Today, the most

significant association is the Kampala Metropolitan Boda boda Entrepreneurs (KAMBE), which is affiliated with ATGWU. While there is significant organisational fragmentation, there is clearly a common interest in enhancing safety and security within the sector, supporting proper systems of registration and training, and distinguishing 'genuine' operators in the boda-boda business from people using boda-bodas to commit crimes. Although there are efforts currently ongoing to deepen discussions between the taxi sector, government agencies, and international donors, these efforts do not presently include the boda-boda sector. The exclusion of such a large number of transport providers from discussions around a potential apex body has been justified on the grounds of not wanting to introduce too much complexity too quickly, but also poses potential risks as it may be difficult to effectively accommodate their interests later on. In addition, the risk of deeper politicisation of informal transport associations is high, and could undermine efforts to develop a unified voice for transport workers.

## **1.2 OVERALL OBJECTIVE OF THE TASK**

This report is the culmination of research that was undertaken to support a comprehensive and integrated urban transport consultative process and to strengthen overall transport policy/decision making in the GKMA. With a more targeted focus on the boda boda industry, the research:

- 1. Provided a situational analysis and mapping of the character, power dynamics, resource potential, and processes of organisation and operation of boda boda associations in the GKMA**
- 2. Generated critical insights into the organisational outcomes of boda boda associations, what (de)motivates boda boda operators to join them, and how they build social capital and other benefits for their members**
- 3. Examined the inter- and intra- cooperative arrangements among boda boda associations and how these influence access to social capital and other welfare dividends for members**
- 4. Investigated how the welfare outcomes of associations and unions can endure and become resilient in the face of growing operational challenges and risks in the city region**
- 5. Mapped gender expressions, attitudes and practices (beyond the binary) within the boda boda industry, and how they influence the management of boda boda associations in the GKMA**

6. Generated practical and implementable recommendations (disaggregated into short, medium and long-term) that ATGWU and its partners can explore and adopt towards addressing major challenges around the organisation and mobilisation of boda boda riders into a cohesive group to contribute to broader transport policy decision-making
7. Provided technical and policy support to the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and Paratransit Consultative Forum on modalities for the inclusion of boda boda associations in transport consultative forums, based on their local needs, capacities and priorities
8. Provided essential learning for building the capacity of ATGWU and City Authorities to mobilise and engage effectively with their members and to prepare participatory and inclusive programmes for members that are consistent with collective urban development paths.

## 1.3 APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

A mixed methodology entailing quantitative and qualitative approaches was adopted to generate the relevant data, information and other in-depth perspectives from different actors. This enabled the establishment of a reliable and credible base for analysing how boda boda groups mobilise, organise and are maintained, in addition to how these groups network/interact with each other in the GKMA.

### 1.3.1 Data and Information Requirements

A combination of qualitative and quantitative research techniques was employed to generate the data and information for the analysis of how boda boda associations are configured from an organisational perspective. A summary of data and information requirements is given in Table 2.

**Table 2: Data and information requirements**

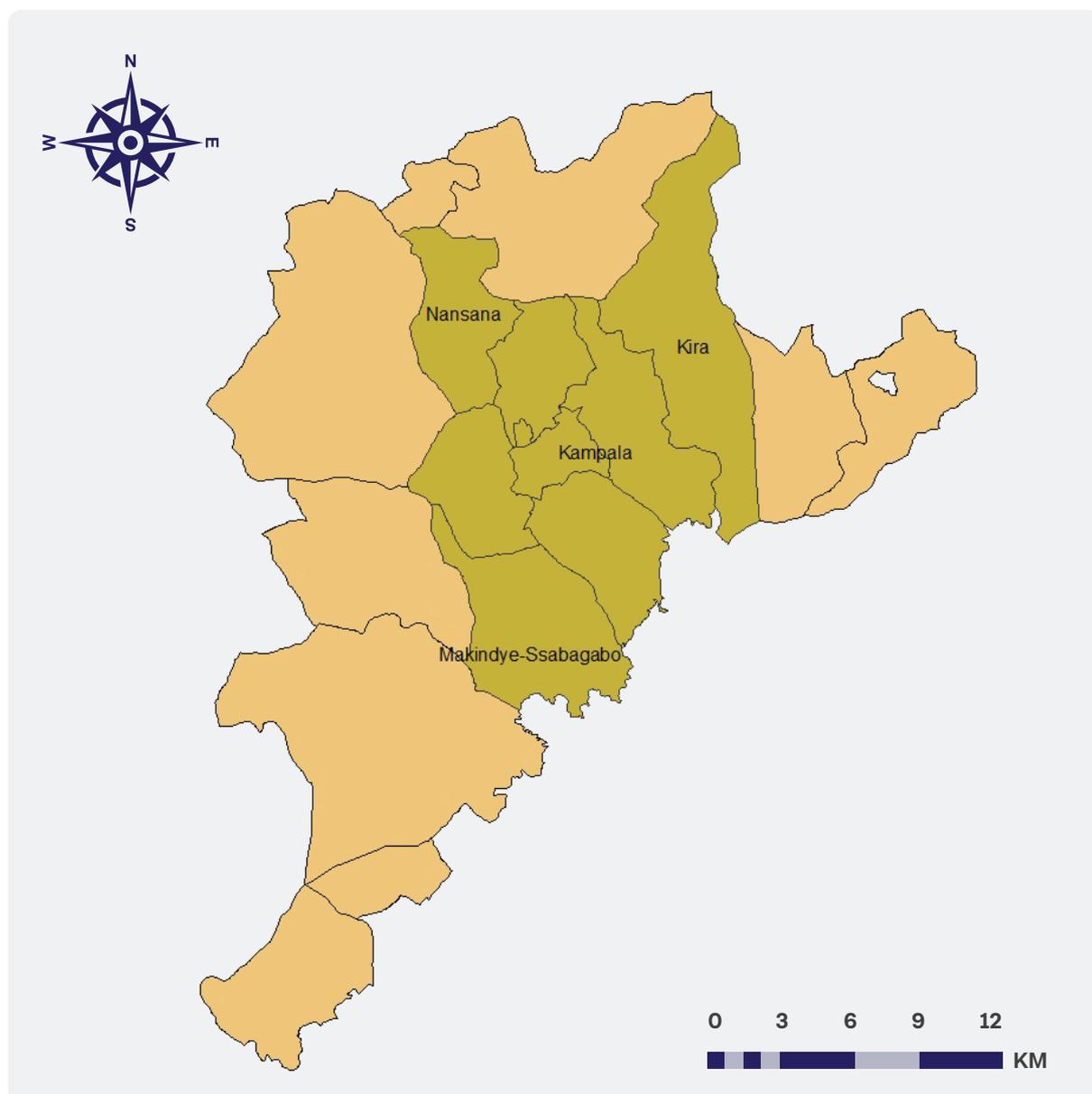
TASK	DETAILS
Conduct a situation analysis and mapping of organisations and operations of boda boda associations in the GKMA	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Analyse the character,</li> <li>b. Power,</li> <li>c. Resource potential, and</li> <li>d. Processes</li> </ol>
Highlight critical insights into the impacts of current organisational configurations of boda boda associations on the welfare, livelihoods and operations of boda boda operators	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. [De]motivations of boda boda operators to become members of associations</li> <li>b. How boda boda operators build social capital</li> <li>c. Socio-economic benefits of boda boda operators who are members of associations/impacts of membership on operators' welfare/livelihoods.</li> </ol>

TASK	DETAILS
Examine the inter- and intra- cooperative arrangements amongst boda boda associations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Nature and extent of interactions between associations</li> <li>b. Influence of these interactions on social capital of boda boda operators</li> <li>c. Other welfare dividends/benefits</li> </ul>
Investigate welfare outcomes of associations and unions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Challenges and risks faced by associations (SWOT)</li> <li>b. Ensuring resilience in terms of outcomes</li> </ul>
Provide technical support to the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and Transport Consultative Forums on modalities for the inclusion of boda boda associations in transport consultative forums, based on their local needs, capacities and priorities	Develop a manual for supporting inclusive participation of boda boda associations in decision-making processes
Provide essential knowledge and learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Build capacity of the ATGWU and the GKMA administrations to:</li> <li>b. mobilise and engage effectively with their members</li> <li>c. prepare participatory and inclusive programs consistent with broader national transport development plans</li> </ul>

The research team worked in close collaboration with ATGWU, FES and selected boda boda associations in Kampala and the municipalities of Kira, Nansana and Makindye-Sabagabo (Figure 1) with an emphasis on examining how operators mobilise and organise themselves to advance their collective interests. This involved a critical assessment of the motivations behind the enrolment of operators into associations, how these associations are run on a day-to-day basis, and identification of the challenges and constraints they face as well as the potential opportunities they present, to inform strategies for organising them into more cohesive and effective units to represent the aspirations of their members.

These were supplemented by syntheses of both published and grey literature to unpack the working arrangements behind these associations. Critical attention was also given to the gender dynamics that prevail within these spaces to provide valuable insights into the extent to which these entities are inclusive/exclusive, as well as the degree of sensitivity to gender issues. While qualitative data was analysed through synthesis and presented using narratives, SPSS and MS-Excel was used to analyse quantitative data. Data collected from surveys, key informant interviews, photography, mapping, observations and experiential knowledge was collated, sorted, coded and then transcribed. The data was then categorised by topic to enable triangulation between the data gathered using the different selected methods.

**Figure 1: Data collection areas in the GKMA**



### 1.3.2 Mapping of and Interviews with Boda Boda Associations

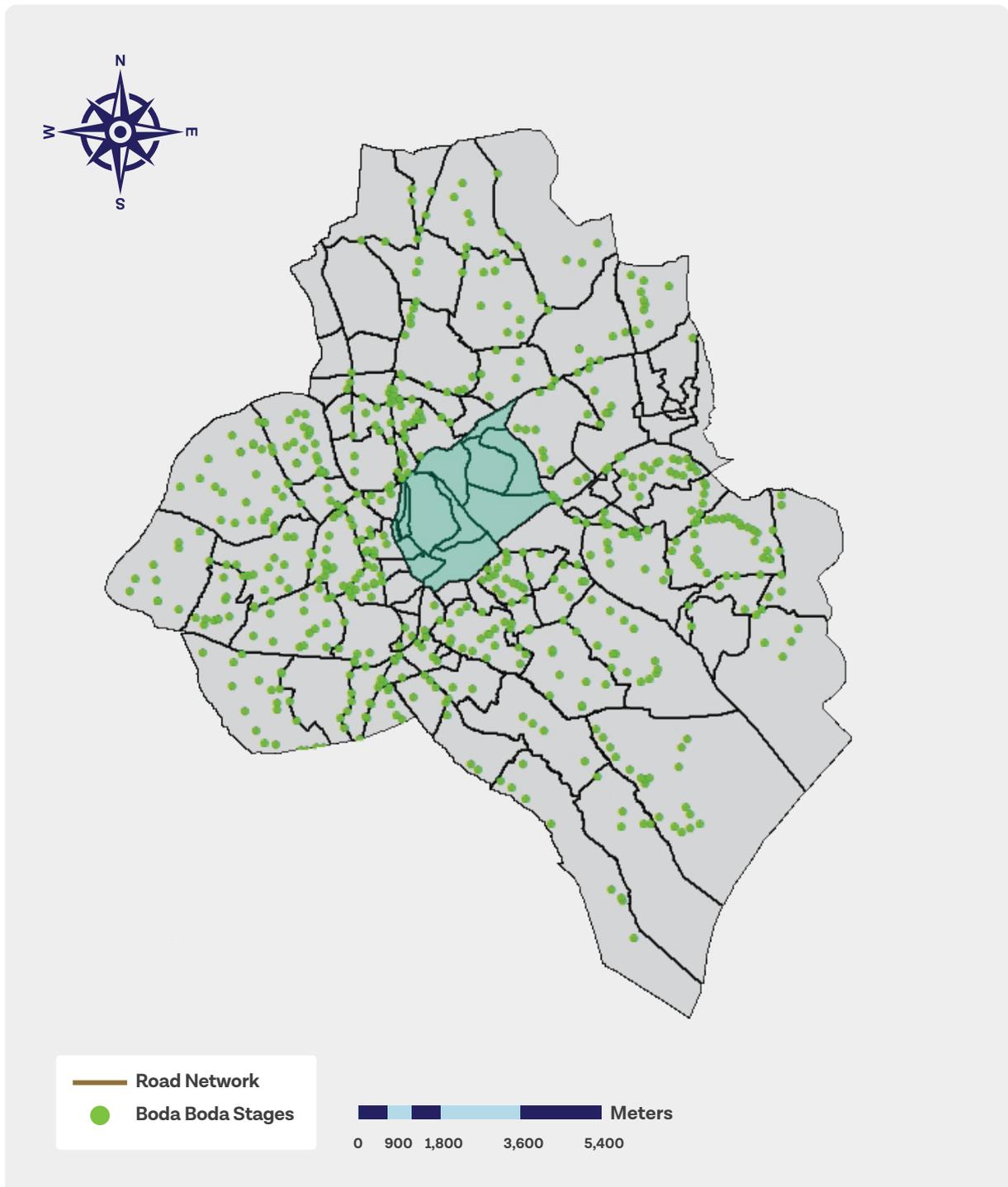
To reach most of the boda boda associations, the research team approached individual member stages across the city region. By 2014, Kampala Central Division alone was estimated to be home to more than 5,000 boda boda stages, a number which is likely to be substantially higher by now given that the city is witnessing a boom in the industry (Nasasira, 2015). The team recorded interviews, Focus Group Discussions<sup>2</sup> (FGDs) and life stories of boda boda operators stationed at 50 randomly selected boda boda stage points in Kampala, Nansana, Kiira and Makindye-Ssabagaba (Figure 2), in addition to engaging the leaders, representatives and staff of formally registered and unregistered boda boda associations.

<sup>2</sup> These involved the mobilisation and engagement of between 6-12 key informants in group-based discussions about issues related to the internal dynamics and externalities related to boda associations in Kampala.

### 1.3.3 Scoping and Review of Documentation

The research team reviewed literature from (1) relevant research reports, media articles, academic work, and government documents; (2) analysis of relevant policies and laws. A list of city-level and national-level documents were reviewed and can be found in the reference list.

**Figure 2: Boda boda stages in Kampala city where detailed data collection was undertaken**

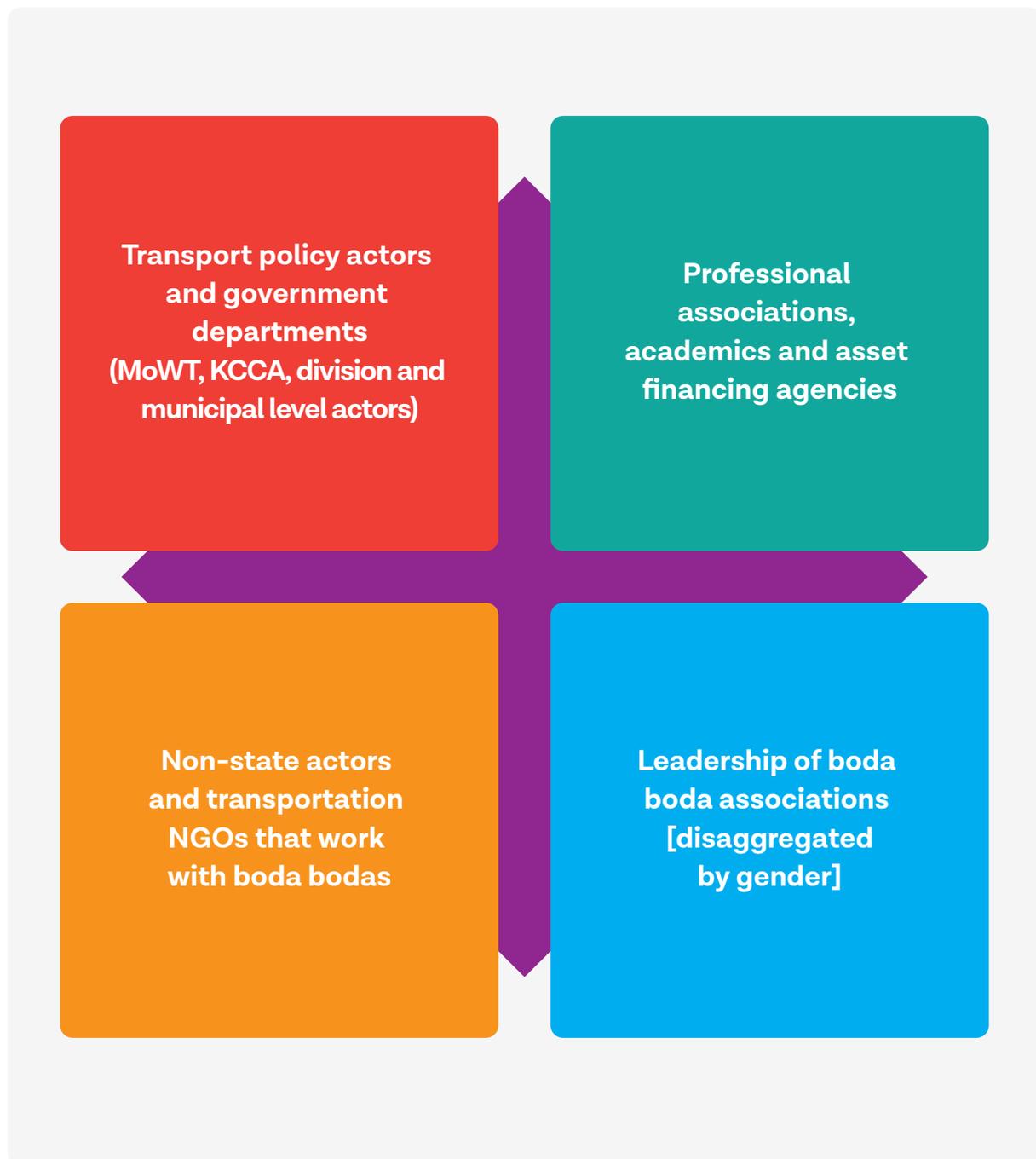


Source: <https://www.kcca.go.ug/media/docs/Approved%20Bodaboda%20Stages%20with%20Codes.pdf>  
[Accessed 17<sup>th</sup> August 2021]

### 1.3.4 Conducting Stakeholder Consultations and Interviews

The research team concurrently engaged with meso- and macro-scalar actors (Figure 3) from KCCA and the urban authorities of Kira, Nansana and Makindye-Sabagabo, as well as other non-state and commercial actors (the National Slum Dwellers Federation of Uganda (NSDFU), Tugende and SafeBoda) to elicit additional insights into this transport sub-sector. To ensure that relatively accurate and valid data and information was generated, the team regularly cross-checked and reviewed the data collected along with evaluation of the process itself. In addition, key informants from the urban authorities in these areas and other relevant stakeholders in the urban transport sector were also engaged through interviews to provide insights.

**Figure 3: Participants engaged in consultations and key informant interviews**



### **1.3.5 Mapping Gender Expressions, Attitudes and Practices in the Boda Boda Industry and Associations**

The GKMA's boda boda industry has been male-dominated since its inception, and despite the industry's growth, only a small number of women have joined it. This mapping activity relied on the preceding activities but had a specific focus on mapping gender expressions, attitudes and practices within the boda boda industry in the GKMA. The team explored gender issues from an intersectional perspective with specific attention paid to the following:

- 1. Gender norms and dynamics in the boda boda associations**
  - a. Asset (motorcycle) ownership by women
  - b. Female leadership and representation in boda boda associations
- 2. Conditions and concerns of women riders**
  - a. Assessing the needs for female engagement in boda boda associations and industry
- 3. Experiences of women riders**
- 4. Existence (or lack thereof) of female-led boda boda associations**
- 5. Use of ICT and digitalisation in the boda boda industry**
- 6. Capacities and Agency: How do boda boda associations handle gender-related issues and concerns in the industry? Do boda boda associations reinforce or exploit gender inequalities, judgments and stereotypes? How do they work around existing gender inequalities and differences?**

To explore the above issues, the research team undertook the following activities:

- 7. A review of existing literature on women's participation in the boda boda industry and a review of related data and information from state and non-state agencies.**
- 8. Gender-specific interviews with identified and selected female boda boda riders and association leaders (where these existed). A number of case studies and boda boda career trajectories of female riders in the GKMA were also examined, to critically interrogate their lived experiences, attitudes and practices in this male-dominated industry. These case studies helped to generate gender-specific alternative narratives about the female boda boda riders who otherwise remain largely invisible in the industry.**

**The gender-specific interviews were guided by focusing on:**

- a. Associations with a dominant female membership
- b. Associations led by women
- c. Associations where there are no female members, or few



Motorcyclists stopping at the Jinja Road traffic lights. Photo by Philip Peter Kairu.



## 2.0 FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

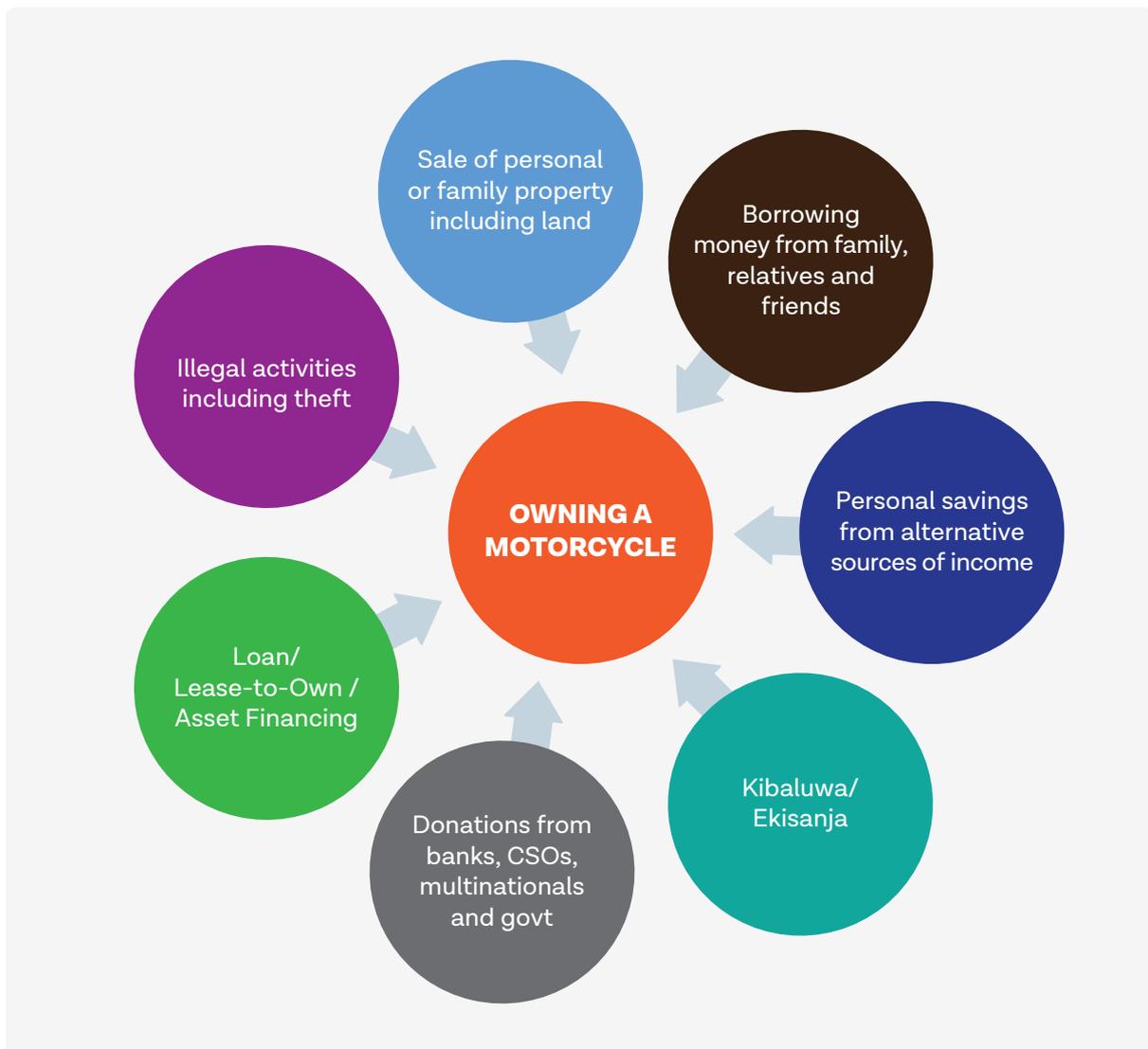
### 2.1 OVERVIEW OF BODA BODA OPERATIONS IN GKMA

#### 2.1.1 Boda Boda Ownership Models

Every boda boda rider's dream is to own a motorcycle; individual ownership paves the way for financial stability, safety and job security. But individual ownership of motorcycles is not always a straightforward path. There are five main routes (Figure 4) that riders follow in order to own their own motorcycles:

1. Sale of personal or family property including land;
2. Borrowing money from family members, friends and relatives;

Figure 4: Boda boda ownership paths and models



3. **Kibaluwa**; a semi-formal rental system through which young people looking for jobs have historically accessed and acquired motorcycles (Ndhogezi, 2021) first rented to them by wealthier individuals and boda boda owners (Courtright, 2021). At some boda boda stages, the Kibaluwa systems is referred to as Ekisanja (when a person buys a motorcycle and then sells it to another person in return for instalment payments). Manwaring and Wani (2021) refer to this system as the 'target' system, and the rider is required to make daily payments to the owner of the motorcycle. It is estimated that 85% of motorcycles across the GKMA are operated under this kibaluwa/Ekisanja/target system. Because potential earnings in the boda boda business greatly exceed those in other low-skilled jobs such as construction, security and retail, many young men are drawn to the boda boda industry (Daily Monitor, 2013).<sup>3</sup>
4. **Lease-to-Own/Asset Financing** approaches. The common observation from all boda boda riders that survive on the kibaluwa/Ekisanja system is that they can earn enough to pay motorcycle rent and survive but not enough to build significant-enough savings to buy their own motorcycles (Kene-Okafor, 2021). They also don't build up any formal credit history or documented income to qualify for a bank loan, and they can never build equity while they are renting their motorcycle (Untapped Global, 2021). This means that credit or other boda-focused asset financing structures, usually based around a rider's relationship to a stage, are vital to many riders' paths to financial stability.
5. **Illegal activities including theft.** Motorcycles are frequently stolen, often violently, and stolen bikes are often exported to neighbouring countries or sold cheaply. However, riding a stolen motorcycle is extremely dangerous, and people suspected of being motorcycle thieves are often killed by mobs, irrespective of their actual guilt

Under the **Kibaluwa/Ekisanja system**, riders pay owners an agreed amount of money on either a daily or weekly basis. By October 2021, the standard rent was UGX 10,000 (US\$2.80) per day for six days, with the seventh day's payment retained by the rider for maintenance (Ndhogezi, 2021). Given that most riders don't own their own boda boda, an average daily revenue of around UGX 30,000 means a take-home profit of perhaps only UGX 12,000 for the rider after accounting for their bike rent and daily fuel expenses. The Kibaluwa/Ekisanja system also accommodates short-term borrowing, indicating that there are many non-boda riders directly involved and profiting from the boda boda business (Ndhogezi, 2021). Boda riders themselves often allow their unemployed colleagues to use their motorcycle for a few hours and return it. One motorcycle might thus be shared by two or more riders, who take turns offering rides (Ndhogezi, 2021). In such circumstances the bike is used almost non-stop, which results in heavy wear and high maintenance costs.

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3 Most boda boda riders, including those working for ride-hailing apps such as SafeBoda, Uber Boda and Bolt, prefer the Bajaj Boxer motorcycle, made by the Indian Bajaj Auto Ltd company (Figure 5). The Bajaj Boxer is not only considered to be more durable than its competitors; it is fast, with newer models now capable of reaching 110km/hr, its spares are readily accessible, and most mechanics can handle its maintenance requirements easily. Fuel efficiency and maintenance costs are key considerations for most boda boda riders because they are the largest variable costs of the business. It is economical in terms of fuel consumption, with its 200cc engine content with running for a whole day's business on less than three litres of fuel. Bajaj also maintains numerous sales and after-sales partnerships which make it easier to purchase, own, maintain and repair their motorbikes more their competitors. Only time will tell whether other manufacturers such as the new Chinese motorcycle assembling companies will disrupt and offset the Boxer's dominant position. For now, it is the king of the motorcycle and boda boda business (Lawrence, 2015). It is no surprise then that Bajaj Boxer motorcycles are reportedly the most stolen model, probably because of their high resale value and demand.

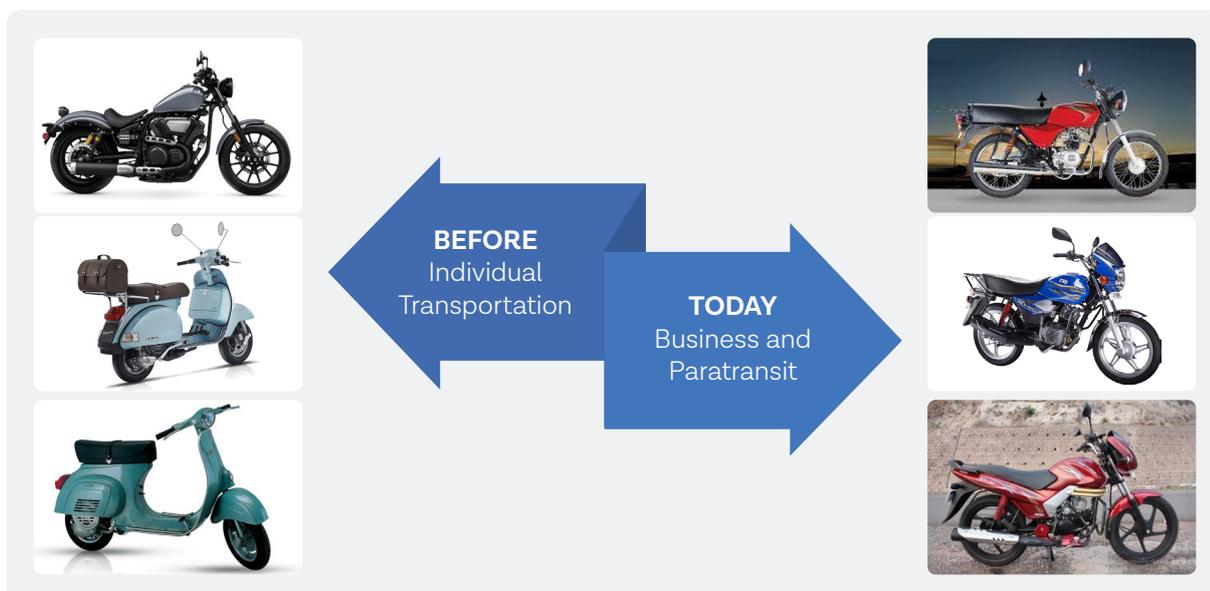
In rare circumstances a rider may be given a few tasks at their bike's owner's home or workplace in place of cash payment. In this scenario the boda boda rider doesn't pay any rent to the person who gives him/her the motorcycle, but instead executes a series of daily tasks and uses the motorcycle in whatever way best benefits them for the rest of the day.

Common tasks include dropping and picking children from school, carrying the bike's owner to their place of work and back, or working part time by distributing merchandise or collecting money from clients (Namale, 2018; Ndhogezi, 2021).<sup>4</sup> The main disadvantage with the kibalua system is that the rider may never get to own the motorcycle unless the agreement changes to one of hire-purchase. The relationship between the bike's owner and its rider can also be contentious, especially when either parties doesn't respect the agreement. It goes without saying that the **kibaluwa/Ekisanja system** exposes many riders to low job security- owners may withdraw the motorcycle from the rider without prior notice, and most riders do not have motorcycle insurance or health insurance.

A motorcycle is typically withdrawn from the rider after the rider has breached the rules of their agreement, whether by defaulting on payments, operating beyond the agreed-upon working hours, having an accident or getting arrested, or misuse or poor maintenance of the motorcycle. Because of the risk of the motorcycle being withdrawn, and because of the rider's vulnerability if they do not have health or vehicle insurance policies, the job lacks stability. Thus, boda boda riders are trapped in an insecure position throughout their driving lives until they acquire their own motorcycles.

For a rider to transition from the **kibaluwa/Ekisanja system** to boda boda ownership, the bike's owner must agree to change the kibalua/Ekisanja agreement into a lease-to-own agreement. In this scenario the weekly payment may increase slightly and all mechanical expenses including oil change become the rider's responsibility (Ndhogezi, 2021; Raynor, 2014). The total amount remaining to be paid by the rider will depend on the state of the motorcycle itself; whether it is relatively new or heavily used. The two parties must also agree on the length of period for paying the weekly instalments. Once all payments are made the seller hands the rider their motorcycle logbook along with proof of purchase, and finally the rider can leave the kibalua/Ekisanja system (Ndhogezi, 2021).

**Figure 5: The old Vespa scooters (left) and currently-popular motorcycle types in the GKMA - top, Bajaj, middle, TVS and bottom, Mahindra**



4 Raynor (2014) in their study observed that boda boda riders engage in service delivery activities including but not limited to transporting regular passengers and medical patients, delivering letters, documents and messages, transporting luggage, goods and groceries, taking children to school, providing directions, providing roadside assistance (such as delivery of fuel to cars that run out of fuel by the roadside) and security (participating in community policing – such as being part of an information network capable of recovering stolen goods and even sometimes acting as police/security informants (Raynor, 2014). Those who are attached to stages often position themselves as more loyal and trustworthy, cultivating long-term relationships with people who live within their milieu in return for being assigned income-earning tasks (Courtright, 2021).

To facilitate and support riders to acquire their own motorcycles, several entities across the GKMA have started lease-to-own and asset financing schemes whose sole purpose is to empower boda boda riders and provide a path towards motorcycle ownership (Table 3). For example, in 2010 Tugende Ltd launched the ‘Own Your Own Boda’ a for-profit enterprise aiming to put riders on a path toward owning their motorcycles (Figure 6). It started informally with handwritten contracts, but progressed into using technology to scale solutions (Kene-Okafor, 2021). These kinds of schemes are largely dominated by asset financing and financial institutions which specialise in hire purchase payment plans, and their schemes are sustained by the profits generated by the interest rates that they impose on the financed assets (Courtright, 2021; Serunkuma, 2021).

**Figure 6: TUGENDE boda boda riders with their signature branded reflector vests**



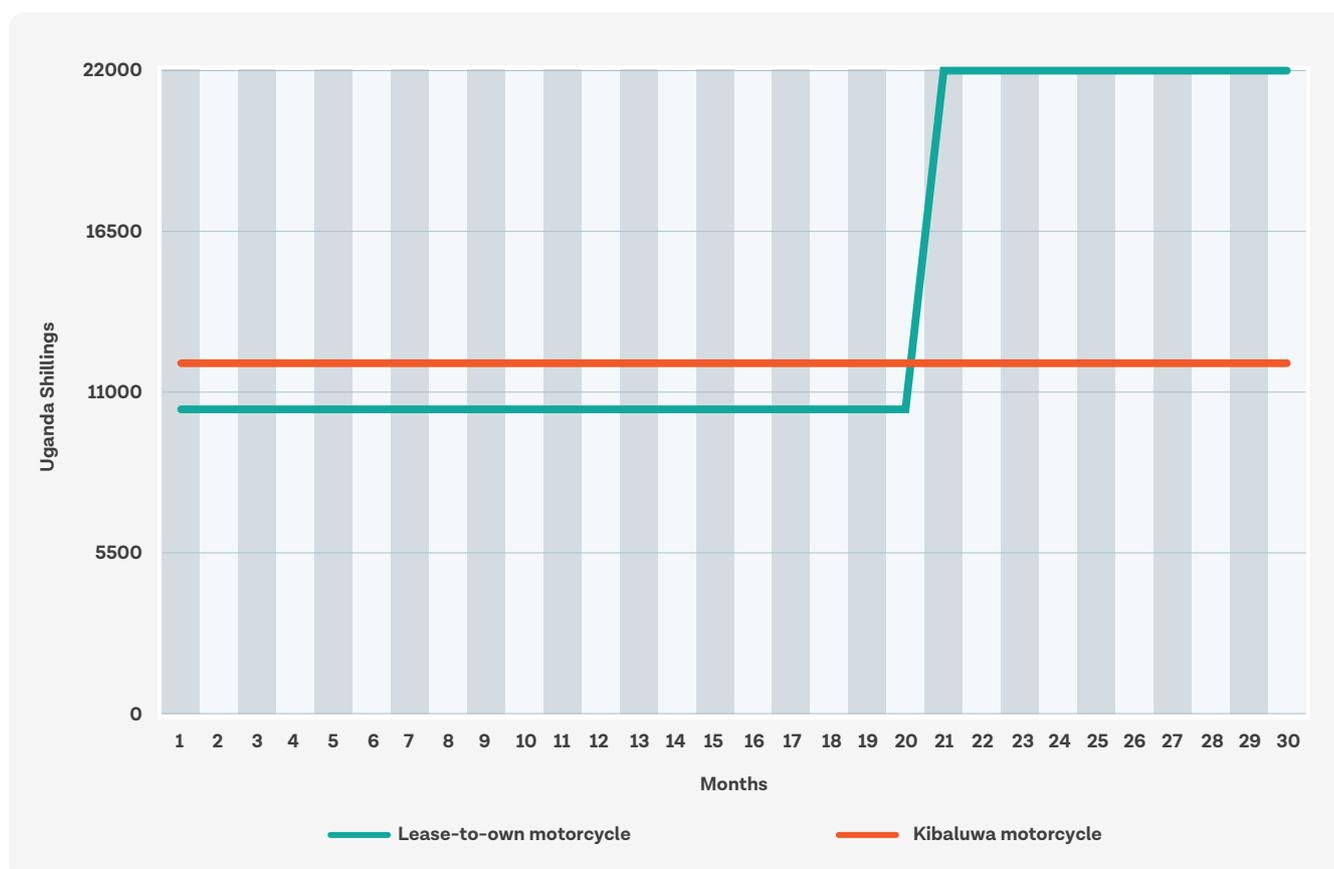
Boda Boda drivers crossing a junction from all sides whenever it suits them.  
Photo by Philip Peter Kairu.

The most prominent advantage that the lease-to-own scheme has over the **kibaluwa/Ekisanja system** is that the boda boda rider doesn't need to rent a motorcycle forever (Inoue, 2019). Our analyses also showed that the revenue performance after the payback period is higher than that of an ordinary **kibaluwa/Ekisanja** motorcycle (Figure 7).<sup>5</sup> While others argue that boda boda riders are the product of an unproductive economy, data from Kene-Okafor (2021) and Roosblad (2015) shows that once boda boda riders own their own boda bodas they make more money, doubling their take-home profits from \$5 per day to \$10. While this may be true, there are mixed signals as to whether the income from boda businesses can support sustainable livelihoods.

<sup>5</sup> It should be emphasised that the boda boda industry operates in an unregulated environment and boda boda riders have significant agency over the prices they charge for their services- they essentially determine how much their time is worth, and prices can be negotiated with passengers. Interviews revealed that boda boda fares were not stable but varied from one stage to another, usually determined by distance, ability of the customer to negotiate, size/weight of customer, number of accompanying children and size and shape of luggage to be transported, time of day, and weather conditions. It is also a common perception that stage-based riders are significantly more expensive than drivers found on the road (lubyanza), because the former must include fuel used for the return trip while the latter need not do so since they are almost always able to pick up passengers anywhere and therefore have less solo riding time to include in the passenger pricing (Courtright, 2021c). Indeed, Kumar (2011) argues that the growth in the use of commercial motorcycles has dispelled one commonly held illusion: fare controls in the public bus market are often justified as supporting affordability for low income populations; however, commercial motorcycles are more expensive than the lowest bus fare, but are increasingly being patronised by the poor due to the inadequacy of bus services.

On one hand, Luvinga and Kilasara (2020) demonstrate that the boda boda business is profitable, with a benefit-cost ratio (BCR) of 2.8 and Net Present Value (NPV) of 8,494,920 Tanzanian shillings (~UGX 13,196,070) over a five – year project duration, which gives boda boda riders the ability to think longer-term and plan for their family’s financial future (Roosblad, 2015). On the other hand, Manwaring and Wani (2021) use rough estimates of daily wages of boda boda riders provided by Spooner, et al., (2020) to compare them with average incomes in Kampala City and at a national level. They observed that while the boda boda sector provides a critical means of livelihood to many individuals in the city, the incomes generated were relatively low.

**Figure 7: Revenue performance of a Kibaluwa motorcycle compared to lease-to-own motorcycle**



Source: Field data

Our interviews revealed that on average a boda boda riders makes 15 trips per day. With an estimated motorcycle population of over 400,000 across the country, this translates to over 6,000,000 trips being made daily. If one assumed an average trip costs UGX 2,000, this translates to UGX 12,000,000,000 of revenue flowing through the boda boda industry daily<sup>6</sup>. Meanwhile, according to Bagala (2021) motorcyclists used an average of three litres daily which translates at current prices (May 2022) to UGX 6,720,000,000 being spent at the pumps daily. With the number of boda boda riders rising and their monetary contributions growing concomitantly, the boda boda industry forms a significant economic force and is therefore bound to have a lot of clout.

<sup>6</sup> This is a very conservative estimate and should be treated as such. A more accurate figure would require more robust empirical and econometric approaches and account for cost items such as fuel and maintenance costs.

Through lease-to-own schemes there are five steps to becoming a boda boda owner:

1. **Both sides establish contact and get to know each other**
2. **Payment of an upfront deposit by the applicant, usually between UGX 300,000-1,500,000 (this also typically includes a non-refundable vetting fee, usually between UGX 50,000 and 150,000)**
3. **The applicant is vetted to determine credit-worthiness and suitability for the service. The stage chair persons sign the vetter's document, and loan scheme officials usually visit the required guarantor's home and make a report**
4. **The applicant secures a riding permit/license**
5. **They present guarantors and pick their bike (Courtright, 2021).**

What is less known, however, are the sky-high interest rates (between 30-50%) and agent fraud that occurs. A relatively inexpensive motorcycle frequently ends up being expensive under such an arrangement (Mwesigye, 2019). The terms concealed within some lease-to-own financing approaches can render riders only able to keep up interest payments and survive with a small balance, but not able to turn their boda boda businesses into thriving enterprises. This may in fact have the opposite effect to what is intended- the lease-to-own companies may leave the boda boda rider more impoverished than they found them. Indeed, the total cost of a motorcycle bought through loan schemes like Tugende is nearly double the cost of the same motorcycle bought with cash (Courtright, 2021; Lubyanza, 2021). The system is also prone to fraud, with vetting agents cheating drivers or offering shortcuts for a fee (Lubyanza, 2021). With limited alternatives, riders will continue to be subjected to the high interest rates and low trust relationships of the existing loan schemes (Ibid).

**Table 3: Selected Boda boda Asset Financing Companies [Loan/Lease-to-Own companies]**

NAME	BACKGROUND AND OPERATIONAL MODEL	PROCESS OF ACCESS TO FINANCE FOR OWNING MOTORCYCLE
TUGENDE	<p>An asset financing company that specialises in lease-to-own financing for boda bodas including providing on-the-job (OJT) and safety training life, medical, property damage and liability insurance, and riding permits, to their riders. The company requires a downpayment of approximately 10% of the total of a new motorcycle (Inoue, 2019). Not only does this scheme allow riders to become owners but it also enhances their independence, job stability and economic security. Moreover, riders become more safety conscious and risk their own assets by riding their own motorcycles, which ultimately increases the efficiency of each ride.</p>	<p>An applicant has to raise an initial amount and provide the company with personal documents such as the National Identity Card</p> <p>The rider is then required to pay a weekly amount agreed on by the two parties until the total amount of the loan is exhausted. In a typical case, after 20-24 months of repayment (known as the payback period), the rider will own their motorcycle</p>
ASAAK	<p>Founded in 2016, this company offers small loans to entrepreneurs via mobile phones under the boda boda financing programme, targeting those who would otherwise not have access to fast and affordable credit. The rent/loan period is 15 – 24 months before becoming full owners.</p>	<p>ASAAK observed that loans created more impact when directly disbursed as productive assets, rather than cash (Untapped Global 2021). Their motorcycle loans are based on financial and behavioural data, such as the number of trips completed on mobility apps, including Bolt (Taxify), Jumia and the applicant’s history with one of several SACCOs.</p>
MOGO	<p>For a new motorcycle, potential riders MUST make a down payment of UGX 495,000 or UGX 700,00 for TVS or Bajaj Boxer respectively followed by a payment of UGX 77,137 per week</p>	<p>The loan period is 80 or 104 weeks and the instalment amount varies accordingly. Other conditions for the boda boda loan include:</p> <p>Being a boda boda stage member for over 6 months;</p> <p>Guarantor from the boda boda stage;</p> <p>Personal ID or passport</p>

NAME	BACKGROUND AND OPERATIONAL MODEL	PROCESS OF ACCESS TO FINANCE FOR OWNING MOTORCYCLE
(Micro) Finance institutions including Centenary Bank, Post Bank, Pride Microfinance, UGAFODE	Centenary Bank has emerged as one of Uganda's leading commercial banks (Tier 1 institutions) that are providing accessible micro-financing through an aggressive financial inclusion drive that has sought to mobilise and enrol low income groups, including boda boda riders and their associations, that have remained largely excluded from formal financial services and products. Kampala Metropolitan Boda boda Entrepreneurs (KAMBE) SACCO is a prominent beneficiary of microfinancing from Centenary Bank.	These loans require formal collateral security like land titles and they require a downpayment of approximately 25-40% upfront.

### 2.1.2 Gender Expressions, Attitudes and Practices

While a significant amount of effort has been made to improve the boda boda industry in terms of the safety, viability and organisation of its players, it remains a male-dominated industry with very few women being granted access. As a result, women's voices are all too often neglected when it comes to transport planning and the pursuit of decent work. From the primary data collected through in-depth interviews with selected local boda boda association chairpersons, (non) association-affiliated boda boda riders and women who have ventured into the industry, several learning points provide the basis for an in-depth discussion that illuminates critical aspects of gender and informal mobility infrastructures, especially in global South cities such as Kampala. Key among the learning points mobilised from the data, there remains a widespread belief that women are not physically "strong enough" to ride motorcycles, or to balance motorcycles with passengers and other heavy loads. Additionally, there is a belief that women can "lose their virginity" by sitting astride motorcycles or bicycles (Courtright, 2021c). However, apart from being the main customers of the industry, women in Kampala are gradually infiltrating the industry and taking up different roles. (Please see also chapter 3.7)



Boda Boda riders parking along major roads searching for passengers. Photo by Yoti Gilbert Giyo



## 3.0 MAPPING AND UNPACKING BODA BODA ORGANISATIONAL DYNAMICS IN THE GKMA

### 3.1 MACRO/MESO-SCALAR FORMAL ORGANIZATIONS AND MICRO-SCALAR INFORMAL ORGANISATIONS

Due to the highly competitive nature of the business, boda bodas riders have organised themselves (on their own and sometimes with support from other institutions) into 'Associations' to establish some order (Courtright, et al., 2021; Obiga, 2017). Therefore, the boda boda industry is largely informally self-regulating through two distinct modes;

1. Formally organised and registered groups.
2. From empirics, there exist about 84 macro/meso scalar level boda boda associations formally registered by KCCA. These mostly operate in the GKMA. Their modus operandi remain unclear although their activity levels spike during political campaigns. Boda boda operators adorn promotional materials including reflector jackets bearing the names of the politicians who provided them. It is also common for political slogans to be emblazoned on T-shirts worn by boda boda riders (Daily Nation, 2015). As Goodfellow (2017) notes, some of the boda boda associations were created or co-opted by the ruling government. This includes militia-style groups like Boda Boda 2010, which between 2010 and 2017 served to supplement the coercive machinery of the state and to satisfy the long-term strategy of maintaining political control of the nation-state by patronising young people especially in historically opposition-leaning urban areas. These groups tend to become dormant in quiet periods and then are reactivated either in the run-up to a general election or after major political events (including opposition demonstrations) that the state is keen to contain or manage (Hartmann and Biira, 2021).
3. Informally organized, micro-scalar level committees typically associated with a particular boda boda stage<sup>7</sup>, and allowed to operate because of the exigency of the boda boda industry (Obiga, 2017). Tens of thousands of young men are jumping on boda bodas each year, even as concerns grow over their safety and security record (Kavuma, 2015). Each stage has about 30 boda bodas, with members generally paying between USD 110 and 450 for membership (Olowogboyega, 2020). Given that there are over 1,400 stages in Kampala's five divisions, this means that a lot of cash is exchanged through such transactions. There is little transparency around how the finances of these groups are allocated, except to note that the central government doesn't collect any direct revenue from them (Olowogboyega, 2020).

<sup>7</sup> Stages are mostly located strategically near busy roads, intersections, junctions and shopping areas (i.e. malls, supermarkets), food markets, schools, restaurants, bars, taxi/bus stages and parks. To Inoue (2019), the stage can be considered as a sign of low efficiency, because boda boda riders spend a long time waiting until they carry a passenger, and of waste because after taking a client on a long trip they often cannot find a passenger on their way back to their stage. There is no official rule that compels boda boda riders to return to their stage. Most boda boda riders who are familiar with markets demands will associate with more than one stage, momentarily shifting from one stage to another in anticipation of surging demand. At these stages, stage managers mobilise prospective members, share views and agendas and set rules and regulations for engagement.

**It is unclear how KCCA arrived at the distribution of boda boda stages, but one can only speculate that, beyond prioritising recording existing stages found on the main road network, the chosen locations are essentially arbitrary. But the spatial location of the stages provides interesting perspectives to understand interactions between neighbouring stages and to unpack how social capital operates between and among boda boda associations. Although the random spatial distribution of stages may be beneficial to passengers, it also results in operations and action ranges which overlap and merge.**

There are multiple drivers and motivations behind boda boda stage formation in Kampala (Courtright, et al., 2021). Once a group of boda boda riders claims a strategic spot as a stage, they establish a 'Stage Committee' composed of a chairperson, secretary and treasurer (Courtright, et al., 2021). Courtright et al. (2021) observed that three basic factors contribute to the creation of boda boda stages:

- 1. The threats and challenges that Lubyanza (stage-less) riders face**
- 2. The opportunities available at places with high numbers of commuters**
- 3. The socio-economic support networks stages offer once they are formed.**

There appears to be strong local acceptance for this form of self-regulation of boda boda riders. Through the socio-economic networks that arise out of boda boda stage creation, boda boda riders are able to raise money for each other in times of need and to guard their area (within a certain pre-defined radius) against non-members trying to poach passengers (Courtright, et al., 2021). The instrumentality of the boda boda stage as a structure of social security appears to be perceived by members as its most important characteristic, ahead of its utility as an operating point allowing riders to avoid operating lubyanza style. The territorialist tendencies of boda boda riders in relation to their stage affiliations is sometimes a source of conflict with other boda boda riders attempting to encroach on their geographic service area (the entire area in which boda riders registered at a particular stage are 'authorised' to provide a boda boda service). They also band themselves together to create larger associations across neighbourhoods to lobby for decisions in their favour (for example, these associations have consistently been behind the stifling of the city government's attempts to tax, formalise and regulate their work) and to deal with passenger complaints (Courtright, et al., 2021) including reporting criminal elements, ensuring acceptable hygiene standards and dealing with sexual harassment and other offences perpetrated by those within their ranks.

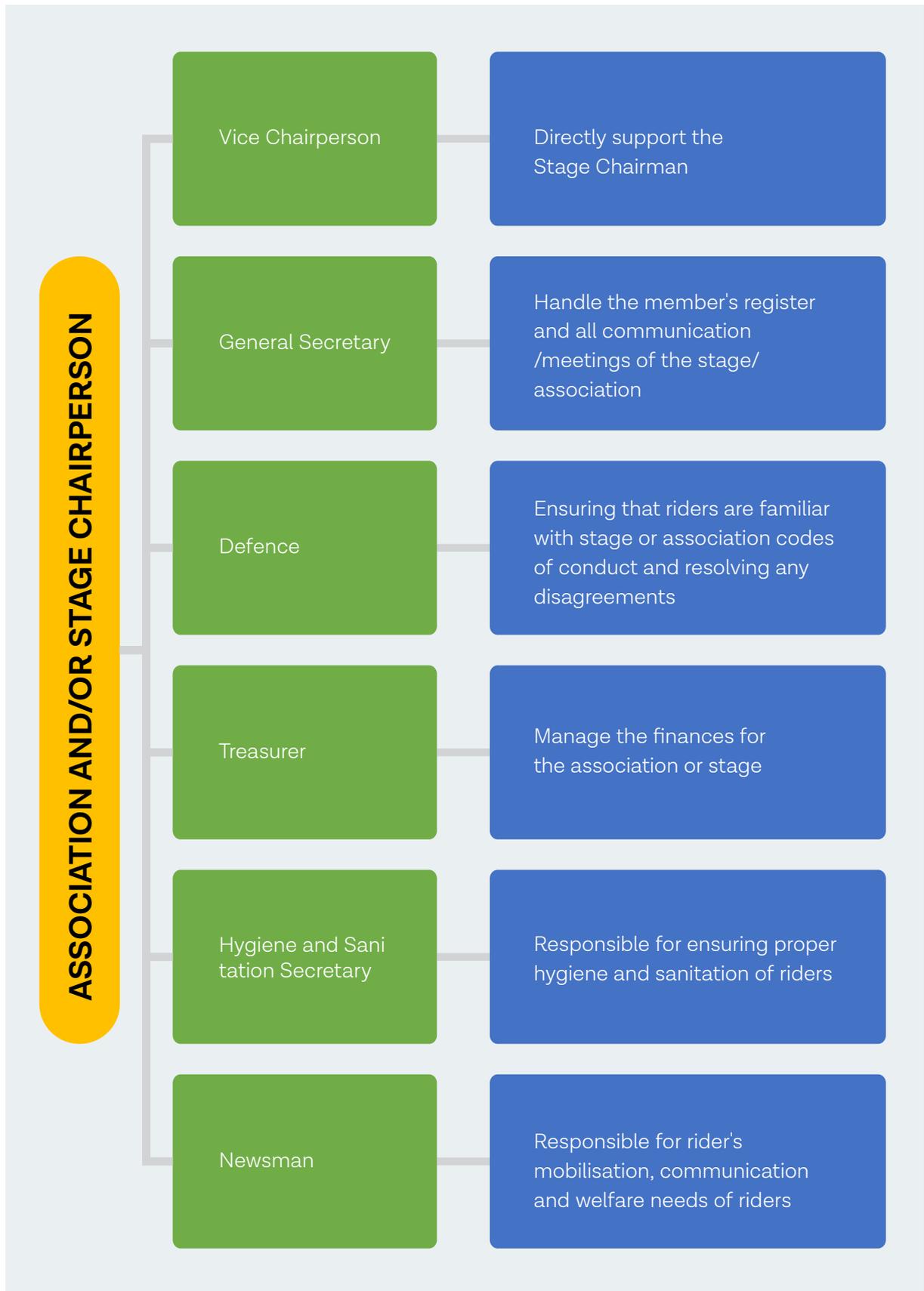
The most senior figure at the boda boda stage is the Stage Chairperson, who oversees decision-making by the stage committee and its members in what they consider a 'participatory process (Figures 8 and 9)'. Together with a committee comprising of trusted cadres, the chairperson controls and influences:

1. **Entry and exit of members:** To operate legally, boda boda riders need a driver's permit, third party insurance, a Passenger Service Vehicle (PSV) license, and a stage so that they can register with their stage committee or association. It was observed that the number of active members varies from one stage to another. Some stages might have 30 riders, while others had over 90. In order to join a stage, riders require a letter of recommendation from their area Local Council 1 Chairperson and two referees, and to pay a required fee (Mainwaring and Wani, 2021). Members pay a contribution to their stage of up to UGX 33,000 monthly, which goes towards stage maintenance, informal loans, or payment of fines (Manwaring and Wani, 2021). However, in reality many riders enter the market without registering with any stage, and it is estimated that about 30-40% of riders in Kampala City are not registered.
2. **The stage registration fee;** This varies from stage to stage but is usually determined by the location of the stage and is at the discretion of the first riders who set up the stage. This fee is paid by a member once, upon joining a stage, and is typically shared by the stage committee and existing members. Boda boda stages in upscale neighbourhoods or near vibrant shopping arcades and market areas, offices and bars and key road intersections attract higher fees compared to elsewhere. For example, space on a stage at Oasis Mall or Garden City, two upmarket shopping centres in the heart of the city, may cost more than UGX 2 million to buy into because they attract high-income foreigners who tend to pay higher fees than locals. For stages in residential suburbs like Ntinda and Naalya, a stage might cost between UGX 800,000 and UGX 1 million (Mwesigye, 2019). A generalized description of the boda boda stage fees is given in Figure 10.
3. **Monthly welfare contributions,** which also vary widely but which are typically available to all members on the basis of need
4. **Which riders to support and recommend through the kibuwa/Ekisanja** (Courtright, 2021) - an informal arrangement where wealthy owners of motorcycles rent them out to riders or unemployed young people, with an agreement to remit a proportion of the earnings/returns made by the latter. The riders are mostly at the mercy of the owners who can repossess the motorcycles without advance notice <sup>8</sup>.
5. **The threshold and transport service areas within which to allow or deny the establishment of another competing boda boda stage.**

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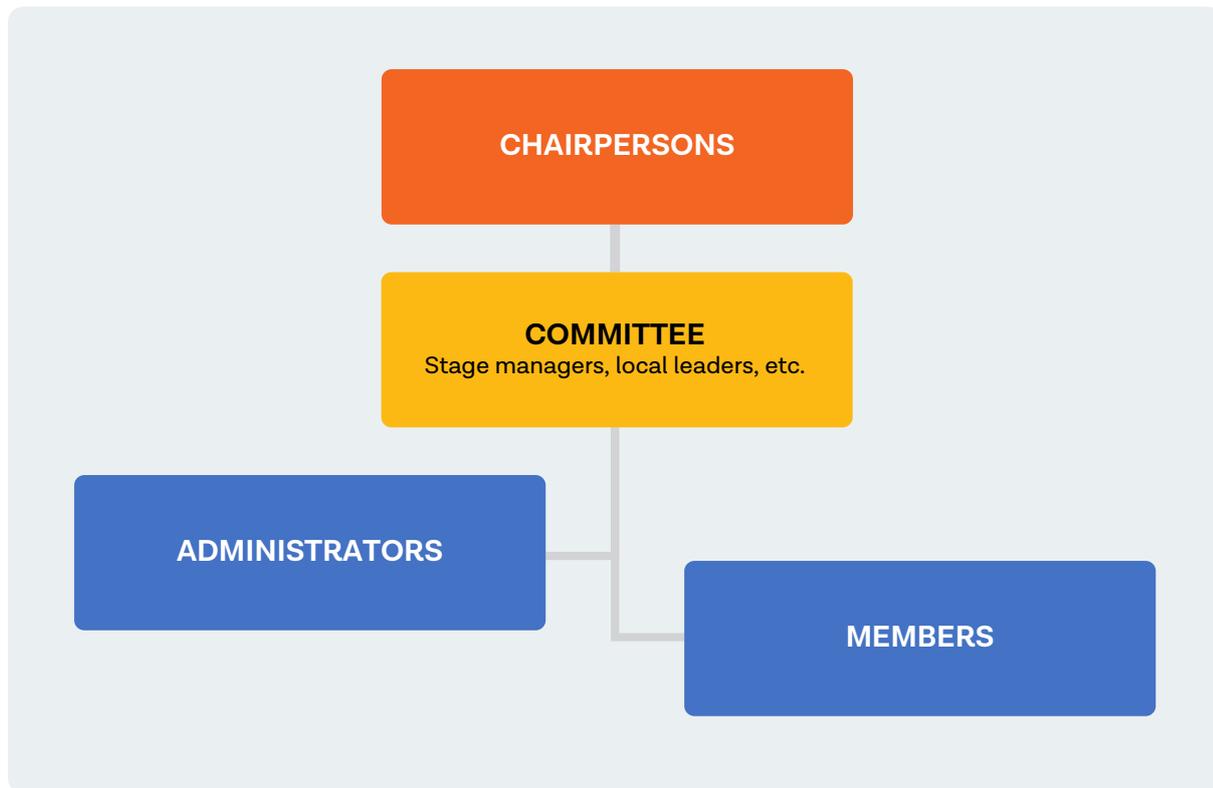
<sup>8</sup> <https://medium.com/lubyanza/getting-a-motorcycle-2-the-loan-scheme-df72baf3073a>

Figure 8: Leadership organisation at boda boda stages



Source: Fieldwork data

**Figure 9: Hierarchical administration of boda boda associations in the GKMA**



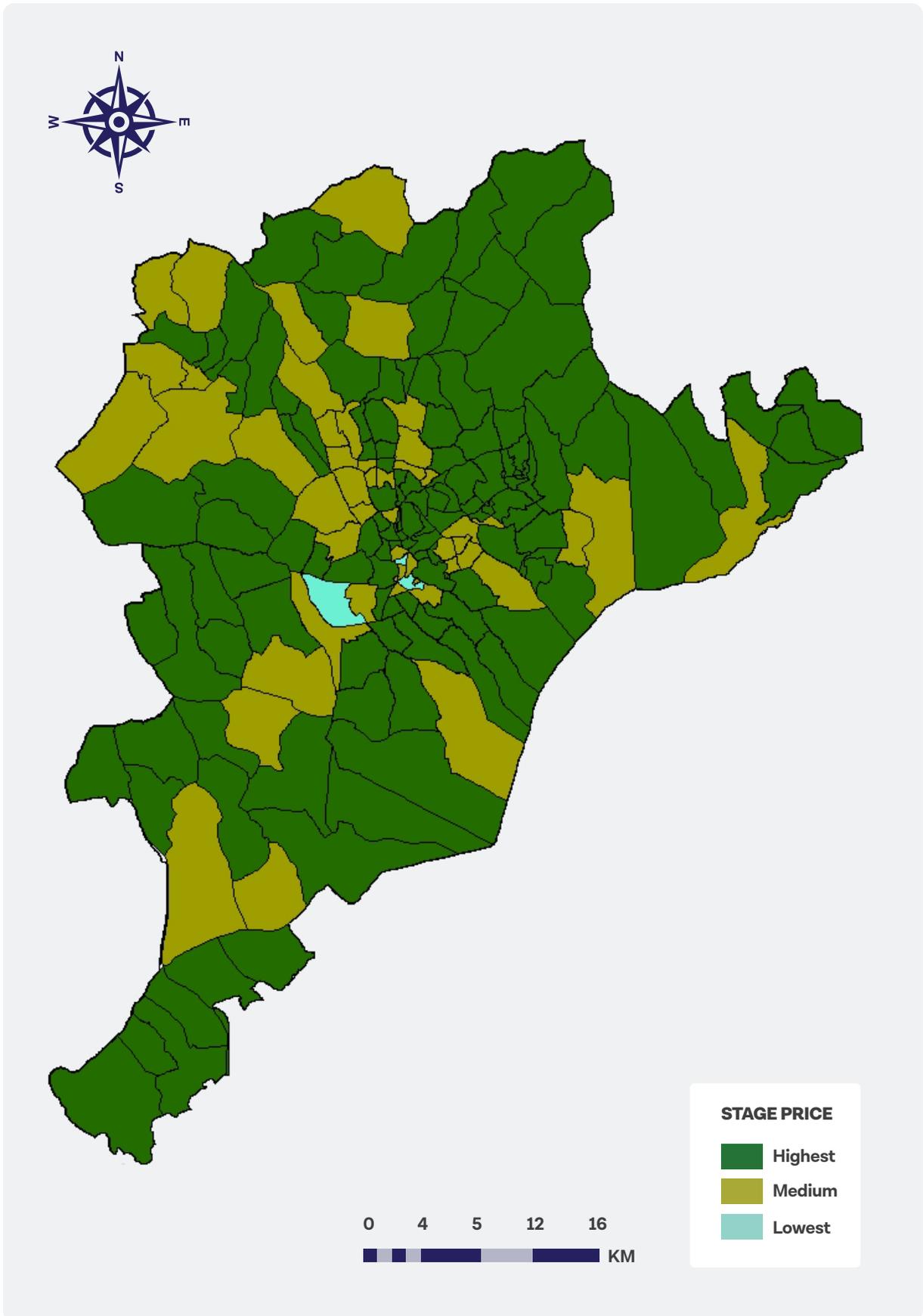
Source: Fieldwork data

In principle, the chairpersons are meant to provide overall strategic leadership, oversight and guidance with the support of their committees. However, in practice, for most associations, the chairpersons tend to be charismatic and dominant men who wield a lot of power and hence are rarely challenged by their committees.

The chairpersons generally play multiple roles in resolving conflicts and making decisions on contentious issues, in addition to negotiating on behalf of their association with other rival associations or other actors. Thus, power is highly personalised rather than institutionalised in the majority of both small stage-based and larger formal boda boda associations. Chairpersons are key focal points of internal decision-making processes and therefore their interests significantly influence outcomes. Real power is essentially concentrated in these male-dominated positions, and patriarchy is highly entrenched within these committees. Of the 37 boda boda associations from the city's five urban divisions that were engaged for our research, all had male chairpersons. A few of the associations had recruited women into the support committees, though the few women actively involved in these associations mostly held roles as treasurers and office administrators with little power.

The committees often appear to be mere functionaries, creating a distinctly vertical power hierarchy operating within a highly informal space; the chairpersons positioned at the top, followed by the committees with little in terms of meaningful delegated power, and subscribed members and employed staff at the lower end. It is within these hierarchical arrangements that decisions around membership recruitment, the creation of boda stages in specific territories, stage leadership and management, codes of conduct, daily contributions for savings, and other issues, are made. The choreography of actor relations within the majority of Kampala's boda associations closely follows the above loose structure. The most prominent example of such personalisation of power by a chairperson is Boda Boda 2010. At its peak after 2010 its chairperson, Abdullah Kitatta, wielded considerable power to mobilise its vast membership for advancing the political interests of his political patrons.

Figure 10: General boda riders' impression of boda boda stage fees in the GKMA



Source: Fieldwork data

## **3.2 VERTICAL POWER INTERACTIONS IN BODA BODA ASSOCIATIONS**

Evidence collected through critical observation, engagement in in-depth discussions and interviews with boda riders and other stakeholders suggests that relationships within boda associations are largely vertical in nature in this male-dominated realm. But despite their verticality, interactions within these associations are characterised by ongoing tension between personalised power and interests on the one side and collective benefits on the other. From the outside, their inorganic nature notwithstanding, boda boda associations have slowly evolved into configurations. Evidence shows that each association is enrolled in an intricate social network of interdependent elements that has emerged through the spatiotemporal decisions and logics of their chairpersons, the stage managers, commuters, local leaders, private entrepreneurs and, indirectly, state actors such as KCCA. They have also built connections with law enforcement personnel.

These visible and invisible actors, ranging from the chairpersons, committee members, boda stage managers, administrators (increasingly women) and their respective members (i.e. the boda riders), manage all of these intricacies despite largely informal working arrangements. Chairpersons, as highlighted before, are key focal points of internal decision-making processes and therefore their interests significantly influence outcomes. The real power essentially appears to be in the hands of the chairpersons. These male-dominated power arrangements also underpin decisions related to the organisation of group activities (including trainings, awareness campaigns etc.) and these issues, in addition to which or whose agenda to support where local or higher stakes political leadership is concerned, are very much influenced by the above actors.

A study conducted by Kakembo (2010) showed that boda boda associations take care of the welfare of their members in times of emergencies such as attending to a sick rider, loss of job or paying damages should a rider suffer an accident. Other contributions were:

- 1. Increasing level of savings**
- 2. Increasing access to loanable funds**
- 3. Providing assistance to open bank accounts**

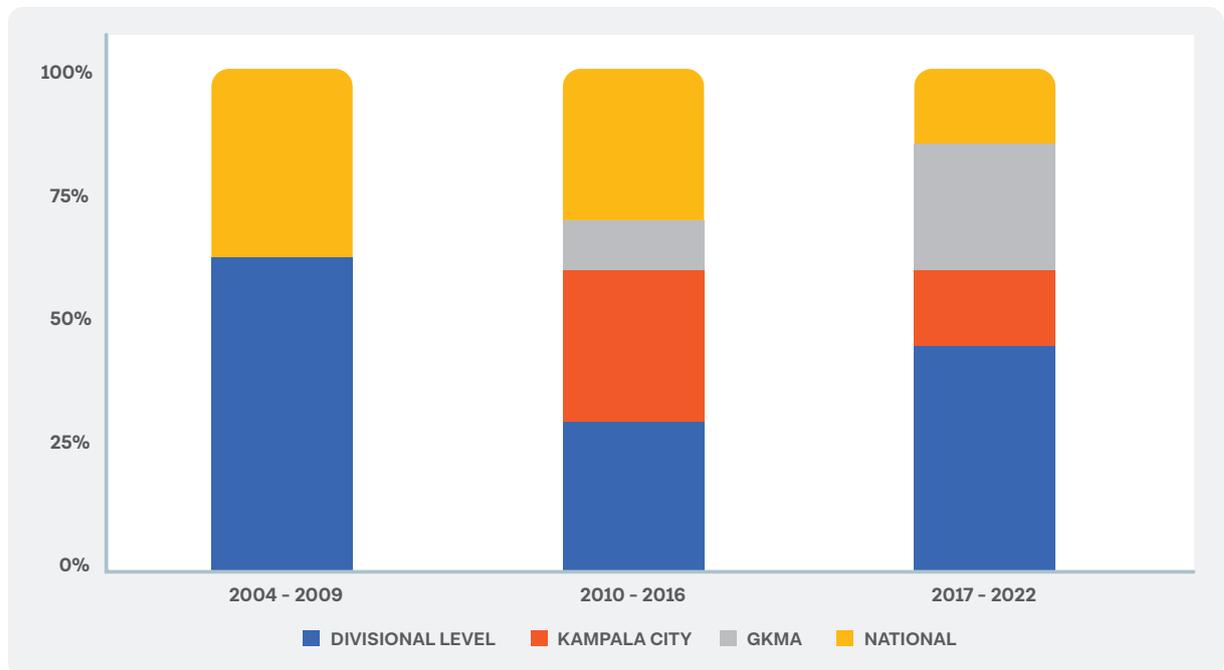
However, it has to be emphasised that interactions around the above issues almost inevitably engender conflict. Conflict is therefore a pervasive element of most associations and Obiga (2017) attributes it to:

- 1. Lack of policy and guidelines for the industry**
- 2. Business and leadership wrangles within the sector**
- 3. Political interference and/or patronage by different forces and individuals**
- 4. Deliberate misuse of the boda boda industry by external forces for ulterior motives such as criminal activities and insecurity**

### 3.3 SEGMENTATION OF BODA BODA ASSOCIATIONS

Data shared by ATGWU from a rapid survey and updated during the study as presented in Figure 11 and Table 4 depicts several key messages. Firstly, the history of boda boda associations in the GKMA only dates back 15 years to when two associations, Bonna Mobile Shield (BOMOSH) and Kampala Union of Boda Boda Cyclists Association (KUBOCA) were formed in 2004. In the period between 2004 and 2009 boda boda associations were only created at city division and national levels. Since then this has changed significantly, with a rapid rise in the number of boda boda associations now registered. Notably divisional and city associations increased rapidly in number. At the time of this study, the number of associations stood at 84, a jump of 4200% since 2004. About 45% of bodabodas are registered to operate at division level, and 24% of the associations are nationally registered compared to 31% dedicated to covering metropolitan spaces. However, given the nature of travel patterns in the GKMA, for an association to be registered at a specific level doesn't preclude boda boda riders from operating in other parts of the GKMA.

**Figure 11: The character of boda boda associations by area of registration**



Source: Fieldwork data

Depending on the number of members in each association and the spatial reach of the association, data and information generated from fieldwork makes it possible to cluster Kampala City's many self-initiated boda boda associations by size into small, medium and large associations.

This study considered small-sized associations as those with a membership of less than 1,000 members. In general, 70% of all registered associations across division, city, metropolitan and national scales can be considered as small-sized. At the division level 90% of operating associations are small, and of those registered at city level the number rises to 100%, almost all memberships of both levels consisting of riders from various stages in each of the city's five divisions. Within the same group are also the informal, unregistered stand-alone stage-based associations which mostly have no more than a handful of members. Our interviews with association chairpersons revealed that these small sized associations provide the bulk of members for the higher first and second tier (national and metropolitan) associations.

Stage-level associations' mobilisation and organisation was mainly motivated by riders seeking to unite and create a critical mass to engage in meaningful dialogue with central and city governments as well as with the Uganda Police Force (UPF). These associations are therefore perceived by boda boda riders as the platforms from which they can advocate for their collective interests and for recognition as legitimate players in the development process, in addition to providing a capacity for accountability that could help in challenging harmful stereotypes that frequently cast them as criminals in the media and the popular imagination.

We categorised the medium-sized associations as those with membership of between 1001 and 10,000 riders, as indicated in Table 4. Data suggests that associations under this group are registered and operate at city scale, bringing together members from different divisions and even from the Metropolitan area including Wakiso district. Membership is varied, with a significant proportion drawn from the smaller division-level independent, stand-alone groups, although there are instances where members operating at the local level stages are directly registered under these groups.

**Table 4: Size and operational/registration level of boda boda associations.**

SIZE OF ASSOCIATION		REGISTRATION AREA				TOTAL
		DIVISIONAL LEVEL	KAMPALA CITY	GKMA	NATIONAL	
Small-sized associations (<1000 members)	F	19	6	4	5	34
	% Across registration area	90	100	50	38	71
	% Across associations	56	18	12	15	100
Medium sized associations (1001 – 10,000 members)	F	1	0	2	4	7
	% Across registration area	5	0	25	31	15
	% Across associations	14	0	29	57	100
Large sized associations (Above 10,000 members)	F	1	0	2	4	7
	% Across registration area	5	0	25	31	15
	% Across associations	14	0	29	57	100
Total	F	21	6	8	13	48
	% Across registration area	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Fieldwork data

The third group of associations appears to transcend these spatial boundaries of the former, extending their reach across all of the main administrative boroughs of the city. These are fewer in number but claim large memberships, with more than 10,000 members each. Associations under this category include or have included Century Boda Boda Motorcycle Association, KAMBE, Boda Boda 2010 and Boda Boda Industry of Uganda.

79% of the boda boda associations revealed they have only been formally active and functional since the last ten years, while 26% have only been registered in the last one year (2020) (Figure 12). This may be explained by what we consider to be a series of changes and watershed moments (some of which we come to in subsequent sections) that happened between 2004 and 2019 in the GKMA and across the country as listed below and summarised in Figure 13;

1. **Activation of Kampala Union Boda Boda Cyclists Association (KUBOCA)**
2. **Section 8 of the KCCA Act 2011 gives the authority power to make ordinances in conformity with the Constitution or any other law made by Parliament. The Boda Boda Ordinance and 2013 Boda Boda Registration exercise sought registration of all boda boda operators as well as formation of boda boda cooperative unions, registration of all online boda boda associations, gazetting of stages and issuance of operational licenses.**
3. **The Government of Uganda launched the ‘Emyooga’ Programme,<sup>9</sup> which targets informal sector Savings and Credit Cooperative Organisations (SACCOs), categorised in 18 clusters, and supplied seed capital through those SACCOs.<sup>10</sup> Boda boda operators were urged to form SACCOs to benefit from this.**
4. **Many riders cannot afford the high cost of a motorcycle. Raynor’s (2014) study showed that close to 71% had only acquired ownership of a motorcycle through loan schemes. Over the past decade, there has been a rapid rise in asset financing companies designing products to appeal to this large market. One of the typical qualifying conditions of these schemes is that a rider must be a member of a boda boda association, which has motivated riders to get registered. Boda boda associations enjoy a complicated relationship with the opportunities that have been opened up by asset financing companies.**
5. **In 2020 Cabinet issued a directive, the New Cabinet Plan, to regulate boda boda operations in the capital city and restore order in the transport industry (Daily Monitor, 2020). The Cabinet Plan requires that all boda bodas operate from gazetted stages, register with KCCA through their respective stages and operate outside a newly-declared boda boda-free zone. This is describe in the next sections.**

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<sup>9</sup> *Emyooga is a word derived from a local Ugandan dialect (Runyankore) referring to specialised skills enterprises or a group of people doing the same thing. This programme was initiated by the central government in 2019 to improve household incomes, increase employment opportunities, increase access to specialised financial services and enhance entrepreneurial capacity of different categories of people through sensitisation, skilling and tooling. The groups targeted were boda boda riders, taxi drivers, entrepreneurs, women entrepreneurs, carpenters, salon operators, produce dealers, mechanics, restaurant owners, welders, market vendors, young people, people with disabilities, journalists, performing artists, veterans, fishermen and elected leaders (Karugaba, 2021). The program helps SACCOs to extend low interest credit services to their members and generate internal capacity to grow the seed capital provided by government (Mugalu, 2021).*

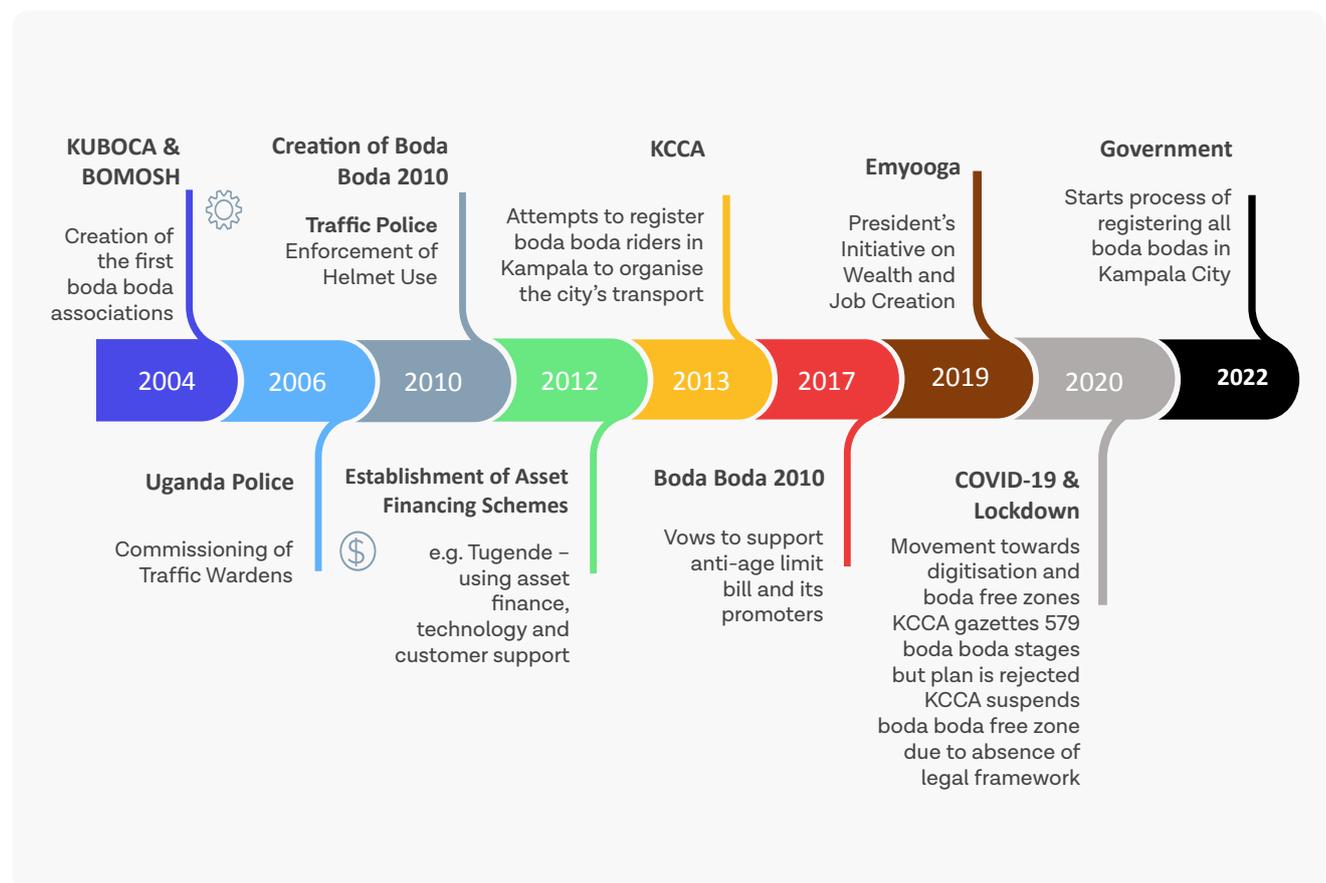
<sup>10</sup> *Each of the above 18 Emyooga-specific SACCO types received UGX 30 million as seed capital or revolving funds to boost member entrepreneurs. In Kampala City, given the nature of businesses, the area of operation of the SACCOS would be within their members' places of work, such as taxi parks, boda boda stages, markets and offices. The members must be involved in one of the Emyooga-targeted categories. Eligible associations must have between seven and 30 members (Kiyonga, 2021; Mugalu, 2022).*

**Figure 12: Number of boda boda associations registered per year since 2004**



Source: Fieldwork data

**Figure 13: Key moments and events in the evolution and growth of boda boda associations**



### 3.4 INTRA AND INTER-ORGANISATIONAL ASSOCIATION INTERACTIONS

Boda boda associations have, over time, evolved complex structures which transcend mere associations of groups of the same social background. The preceding sections reveal two basic forms of working arrangements that exist between and among boda boda associations. While there is some overlap, we categorise them as follows:

1. **Intra-association arrangements- highly personalised power geometries and hierarchical configurations of individual associations**
2. **Inter-association arrangements- often dominated by competition between/amongst associations following lines of political affiliation to 'godfathers'/patrons, rather than focusing on cooperation and collaboration towards strategic collective bargaining and negotiation.**

These working environments and arrangements revealed the following:

#### FRAGMENTED SOCIAL NETWORKS

Boda boda associations in Kampala operate in a highly fragmented landscape, precipitated by the increase in the number of such groups. There is little or no coordination, cooperation or integration between these groups even though they purport to represent boda riders with apparently similar interests and claim to primarily focus on the welfare of their enrolled members. Mobilisation, recruitment and maintaining membership is typically characterised by the 'formal of the informal.'

A clear and visible hierarchy of associations has emerged: some operate at the stages at the lowest level while others extend their reach upwards to the divisions, the city-region and even the national space. This is in spite of the inorganic manner in which boda boda riders mobilise and organise themselves.<sup>11</sup> Their reliance on highly informal structures raises questions and challenges around transparency in terms of documentation of activities and accountability, particularly for external actors who wish to support them, and these need to be further investigated. As one interviewee stated,

*We do not collaborate, because every association is in it for themselves so it is difficult to unite and collaborate.*

- Boda Association Chairperson

*There's a complicated dynamic about boda in Kampala City and in fact the whole of Uganda. In Kampala City, you just need to quietly and gently drive away- there are many angry people. Boda boda riders have their own street courts. They set their own laws and prescribe their own penalties as the case may be, including but not limited to committing persons to death and killing them too.<sup>12</sup>*

Boda boda riders can choose to join any one or more of the dizzying range of associations depending on various factors. The different associations all have varying power, different vested interests and unequal access to resources in this highly contested space.

<sup>11</sup> Associations remain highly informal and organic in relation to their creation, mobilisation of membership, daily management and organisation.

<sup>12</sup> Interview on 18<sup>th</sup> October 2021.

## INTERACTIONS BETWEEN BODA BODA ASSOCIATIONS

Interaction between boda associations appears to be limited to only unity around the collective boda boda interests that would ensure that a 'critical mass' needed for greater inclusion in vital decision-making and policy processes is built and maintained. When asked about the extent of interaction with other associations, several responses were elicited;



*"Our relationship is cordial as we work together to solve the challenges that we face as Associations.... But our relationship is largely based on what we gain from them. All the benefits that come from these interactions are shared amongst our members".*

- Boda Association Chairperson, Rubaga Division



*We do collaborate because we always communicate with each other. In case of any trainings, they always let us know. We have collaborated with KAMBE to create a Union..."*

- Boda Association Chairperson and Treasurer, Central Division

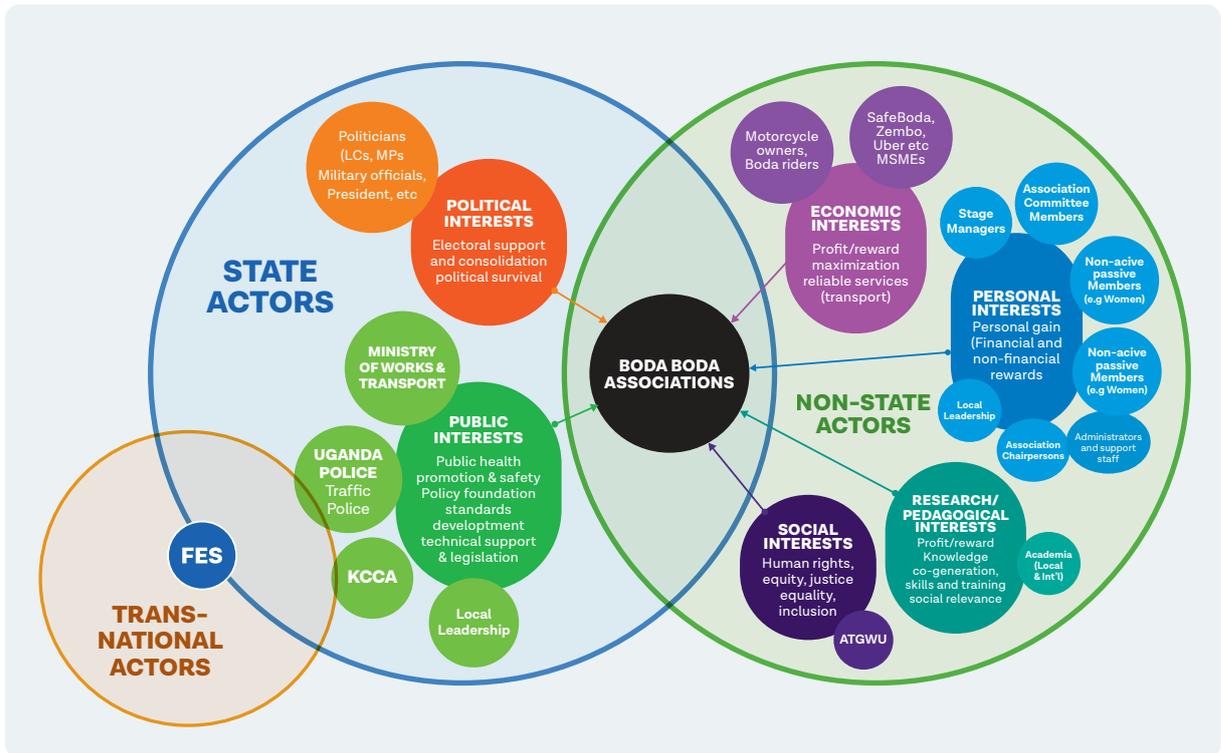
According to analysts, the associations are generally loose coalitions for political activism seeking short-term gains like cash handouts or other favours in exchange for votes and disrupting programs

of political opponents. On the other hand, these coalitions are also engaged as tools by different groups to compete for positions in attempts to assert their dominance over others in inter-association power contests. There is little evidence so far of more constructive engagements geared towards cultivating relationships and building synergies to create blocs that might influence strategic or longterm decision-making for their collective benefit.

## MULTIPLE ACTORS AND INTERESTS

The absence of an efficient public transport system, underpinned by an ever-shifting, highly contested and fragmented political landscape characterised by intense hegemonic contestations between the central government, elites, the opposition, the city's successive administrations and the various groups with entrenched interests in the transport sector (for example the minibus-taxi and boda boda operators and their respective umbrella organisations) at different scales and levels typify the complexities that underpin mobility in a city like Kampala. These groups, and others, are locked in intense power contestations, where the ultimate objective of each is to circumvent or resist development regulations in order to ring-fence their interests (Goodfellow, 2013). Unfortunately, the resulting power gridlock has only contrived to limit the implementation of much-needed interventions to improve urban functionality, which relies on accessible, affordable, safe and efficient transport and mobility (INTALINC, 2019). Interviews conducted during fieldwork revealed that boda associations in Kampala are sustained through the interaction of a diverse set of actors across both vertical and horizontal dimensions (Figure 14).

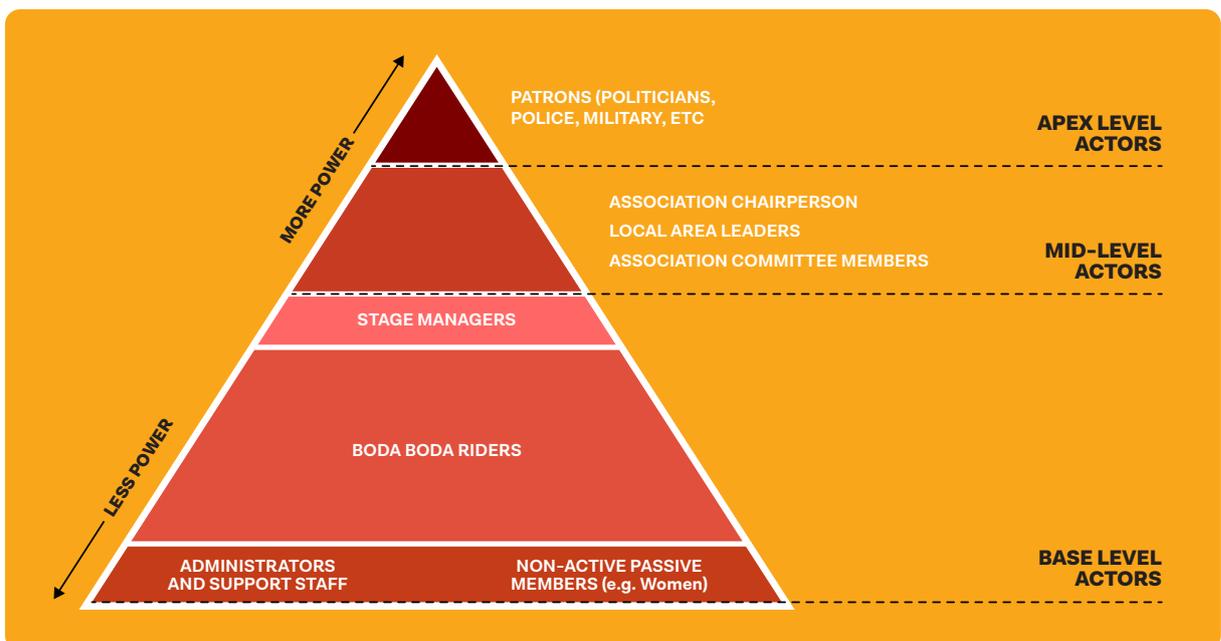
**Figure 14: Multi-Actor Interactions and Interests in the boda boda industry in the GKMA**



### UNEVEN POWER RELATIONS

Power is unevenly distributed within boda boda associations. Although there appears to be a semblance of participation in some processes such as the election of leaders, evidence suggests not all of those who subscribe to the different boda boda associations operating in Kampala have equal input on critical issues, due to the highly personalised nature of power. In the following section, the different actors and their roles are analysed through a three-level stakeholder model (Figure 15) based on their capacity to influence decision-making within this social space.

**Figure 15: Configuration of Power Relations in the Boda Boda Transport Sub-sector**



## BASE LEVEL ACTORS

### NON-ACTIVE/PASSIVE MEMBERS, ADMINISTRATORS AND SUPPORT STAFF

With reference to Figure 15, this group lies at the bottom of the power pyramid. It especially includes women who are gradually breaking into the sector, though still rarely involved as frontline transport service providers. Until recently, this segment remained largely invisible. Interviews reveal that the women in this segment include office administrators, civilians who have subscribed to the associations primarily to benefit from their 'SACCO' arrangements, women who own motorcycles that are rented by male riders, and support staff who run offices. This group of actors appear to have minimal access to decision-making processes although they are playing increasingly vital roles, as recognised by boda riders who were interviewed:

*Women have always given us advice especially on savings, and whenever we get challenges in this field, women play a key role in advising us on which solutions to apply... Whenever we have conflicts to resolve, women contribute a lot in resolution. They are also vital in handling records and that is why we decided to have an office administrator as a woman.*

- Boda boda Association Chairperson

### BODA BODA RIDERS AND STAGE MANAGERS

Boda boda transport is probably the second-largest sector absorbing and providing livelihoods to unemployed young people, rural-urban migrants and

low-skilled labourers in Uganda (private security firms being the largest). Boda riders and stage managers are the core elements upon which the boda associations thrive. Riders (some of whom double as stage managers) are very influential in terms of when and how mobilisation is carried out, who is targeted, and to some extent the kinds of resources that can be accessed by associations. They also hold influence over some more localised decision-making processes regarding when to intervene and support fellow members in times of need (e.g. school fees, home expenses, payment of outstanding loans and other debts, health expenses where members are involved in accidents and support for members who are detained for committing traffic offences). However, from a power perspective their input on critical decision-making, for example regarding which political, economic or other agendas to support at the meso scale level (city-level) is restricted by their limited influence and social networks/resources. In the higher-stakes decisions above them, it is their more socially connected leaders, the chairpersons, who hold sway regarding decision-making processes and ultimately determine who gains or loses where important decisions are concerned.

## MID-LEVEL ACTORS

### CHAIRPERSONS, COMMITTEE MEMBERS AND LOCAL AREA LEADERS (COUNCILLORS AT LC1/ VILLAGE/WARD LEVEL)

Moving up the pyramid another level are the mid-level actors, the powerbrokers, who act as a critical link between the base level and the actors at the top level. In principle, chairpersons are the elected leaders of boda associations though evidence suggests many retain these positions largely because they are charismatic individuals who benefit from the associations and depend largely on the allegiance of their association's members rather than any demonstrated competence to create

and maintain sustainable structures for the long run. They drive processes that set rules to govern how boda associations operate and are managed, how benefits are shared and which agendas to support based on their experience, influence, political connections and personal interests. They are especially instrumental in helping to designate new boda stages, ensuring that acceptable codes of conduct are in place, and monitoring for signs of infiltration by criminal elements. In this way they are critical in creating a semblance of order within the sector. They are vital “living repositories” of valuable factual information, data and tacit knowledge of what goes on in the areas under their control.

Other less prominent or less visible actors include the committee members who serve alongside the chairpersons, though evidence suggests they are largely subservient to their chairpersons rather than providing advice or ensuring any level of impartiality in decision-making. Local area leaders (LC1s) also play important roles as representatives and extensions of the state and state policy, and wield immense power to sanction the formation of associations, assisting them to register as formal entities with the state, and acting as legitimate reference points regarding access to financial support from banks or other institutions. As extensions of the state they also act as law enforcers, defusing and mediating conflicts within and between associations socially on a daily basis. They are an important cog behind the unfolding dynamics of social capital within this sector.

## **ALPHA/APEX LEVEL ACTORS**

### **POLITICAL ELITES**

At the top end of the pyramid are the political elites. These include well-connected and powerful individuals with vested interests and substantial financial and lobbying influence, the most prominent of which have recently come from the military and police. They have emerged to patronise the boda associations, exploiting the absence of a coherent collective agenda and voice from the sector’s leadership. At its peak one group, Boda Boda 2010, had thousands of members and its chairperson was backed by the then Inspector General of Police. Evidence suggests that elite patronage was behind the process that heavily influenced this association to become a front for the incumbent regime in attempts to erode the support of the opposition in Kampala. The association later unraveled when their powerful leader fell out with his backers. He was eventually charged with treason and other serious crimes. Other associations sprung up to fill the void left behind, competing to be politically relevant. These have also followed similar trajectories to Boda Boda 2010, being patronised by other prominent elites including Henry Tumukunde, the then-Minister of Security. In-depth discussions with leaders and riders revealed that political elites are playing a significant role in manipulating, dividing and compromising the boda associations in a systematic and coordinated way, in part to prevent them from coalescing into serious political threats.

### 3.5 OPPORTUNITIES, FEARS (REAL AND PERCEIVED), RISKS AND UNCERTAINTIES FOR BODA BODA ASSOCIATIONS

The GKMA's boda boda associations are undoubtedly playing a key role as social safety nets for their members, providing them with a sense of belonging, solidarity with like-minded actors and networking with actors from different backgrounds, in addition to providing them with a platform to represent their interests in decision-making processes. Accusations of persecution, crime and intolerance in the boda boda industry provided the justification for boda boda associations to emerge. It is perhaps no coincidence that they are also the three vices that appear to be the source of many boda boda associations' downfall (Daily Monitor, 2018b). But if this can be avoided there are numerous opportunities that these associations can harness to significantly improve their role in supporting their members (Table 5). The above opportunities notwithstanding, there are also several risks faced by boda boda associations. We argue here that the spatiotemporal processes and spaces in which boda bodas operate are not only defined by these fears, risks and uncertainties, but they are produced by them.

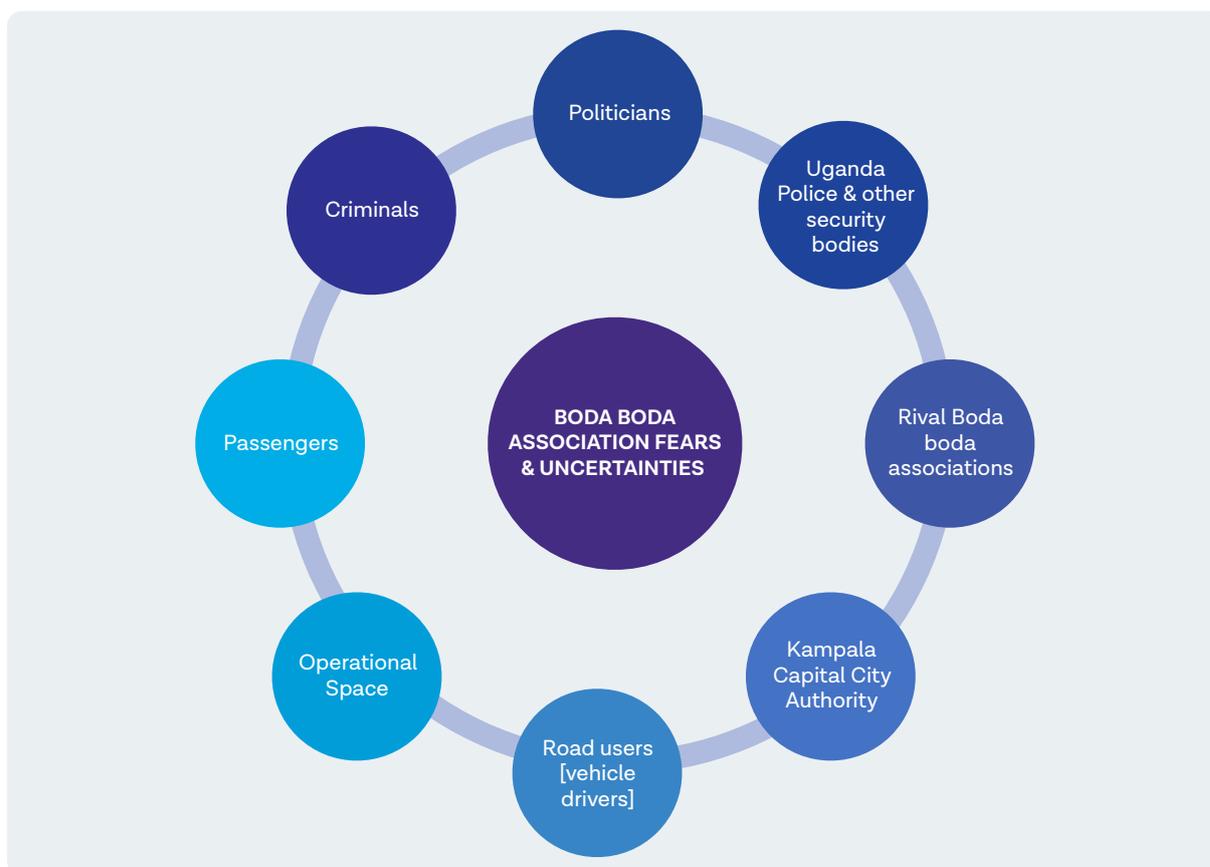
**Table 5: Opportunities for Boda boda Associations**

<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b>	
1)	Goodwill of state and non-state actors to engage with associations: Goodwill of the city government and other external, transnational actors to engage with these associations to improve conditions of their members.
2)	Willingness of riders and other groups such as women to join and contribute to building and strengthening these associations.
3)	Financial support from institutions: Existence of a variety of funding and financial resources from traditional and non-traditional financial institutions to support their members and other entrepreneurial ventures.
4)	New partnerships for transforming associations
5)	Collaborative partnerships to unlock other transformative resources e.g. skilling, ideas, innovations etc.

All the fears, risks and uncertainties illustrated in Figure 16 have related sources including but not limited to:

1. **State institutions (Central government, KCCA, Uganda Police, other security bodies and politicians (both ruling party and the opposition),**
2. **Rival boda boda associations**
3. **Passengers and other road users especially vehicle drivers**
4. **Operational spaces**
5. **Criminal elements**

**Figure 16: Sources of boda boda risks, fears and uncertainties**



## 1. STATE INSTITUTIONS

Government officials, politicians and state bodies including the Uganda Police Force, Kampala Capital City Authority, the Internal Security Organisation (ISO) and others, have all fought for control of the boda boda industry in Uganda for many years. Consequently, these interruptions have created an unpredictable and unstable landscape that has dealt severe blows to boda boda operations, as highlighted in the outcomes. There are commentators who have argued elsewhere that the boda boda industry is and remains a 'political project' deliberately created to satisfy a political purpose. While this may be partially true, particularly with reference to Boda boda 2010 and the NRM Boda boda cadres and their associated operations, we argue here that the single biggest risk that the city's associations have to think about critically, contend with and strategise accordingly to mitigate its potentially negative impact on their future prospects is the continued interference from political elites. It is clear that some boda boda associations are powerful political constituencies

patronised by the political elite which can be mobilised almost in an instant towards the promotion of a certain agenda. This appears to have been engineered through systematic manipulation and co-option of association leadership to enrol and ultimately politically 'weaponise' the local boda boda associations they control. During the 2001 presidential elections, President Museveni jumped on a boda boda as he entered Kololo Independence Grounds to be nominated as a presidential candidate, which many commentators interpreted as a populist stunt to impress his supporters and also court the motorcycles taxi vote (Wesaka, 2018). He has on several other occasions used boda bodas while visiting other parts of the country. But in 2011 boda bodas were used by the opposition in Uganda's urban areas to accompany and draw crowds for the main opposition presidential candidate, Kizza Besigye. Sensing that the opposition had beaten them in mobilising boda bodas to serve their political ends, in a knee-jerk reaction the ruling party, through the Uganda Police, decided to create

and activate camps within the boda boda sector. Moses Byaruhanga, a veteran of political mobilisation in Kampala City, proposed that money be invested to capture the boda boda industry because these young men's voluntary participation in politics was giving Besigye a lot of visibility (Otim, 2018).

These forms of political interference, as well as paralysing the industry and preventing it from formalising, also frustrate attempts at modernising the capital city. As a way to curry favour with boda riders, politicians might choose to be seen to block policy proposals that would impact negatively on their business. This interference, when it happens, appears to make it very difficult to make certain kinds of reforms. The city government's planning policy on mass public transit aims at decongesting the transport system, as well as making<sup>13</sup> progress on its climate change strategy in relation to heavily-polluting vehicles and alternative technologies such as electric-powered BRT. But this will require significant infrastructural often argued that these and other efforts to organise

and overhaul the transport industry in the city have been frustrated by different forces in political and security circles (Daily Monitor, 2018).

Moreover, there is no appropriate legal framework that properly defines boda bodas as a recognised means of transport to be regulated in its own right. Indeed, even the legal requirements for boda boda are not known to many people. This legislative gap has therefore left the interpretation of the laws and policies governing transportation in the GKMA in a state of confusion. The lack of appropriate legislative frameworks is worsened by the fact that the existing transport system, including boda bodas, is privately owned, leaving the task of running the industry entirely to its operators (Okello, 2020). All attempts introduced by KCCA to re-organise and reform the boda boda sector including the boda boda-free zone (Figures 17 and 18) have been met with ridicule and resentment from several quarters including but not limited to State House, the Uganda Police and the boda boda associations themselves.

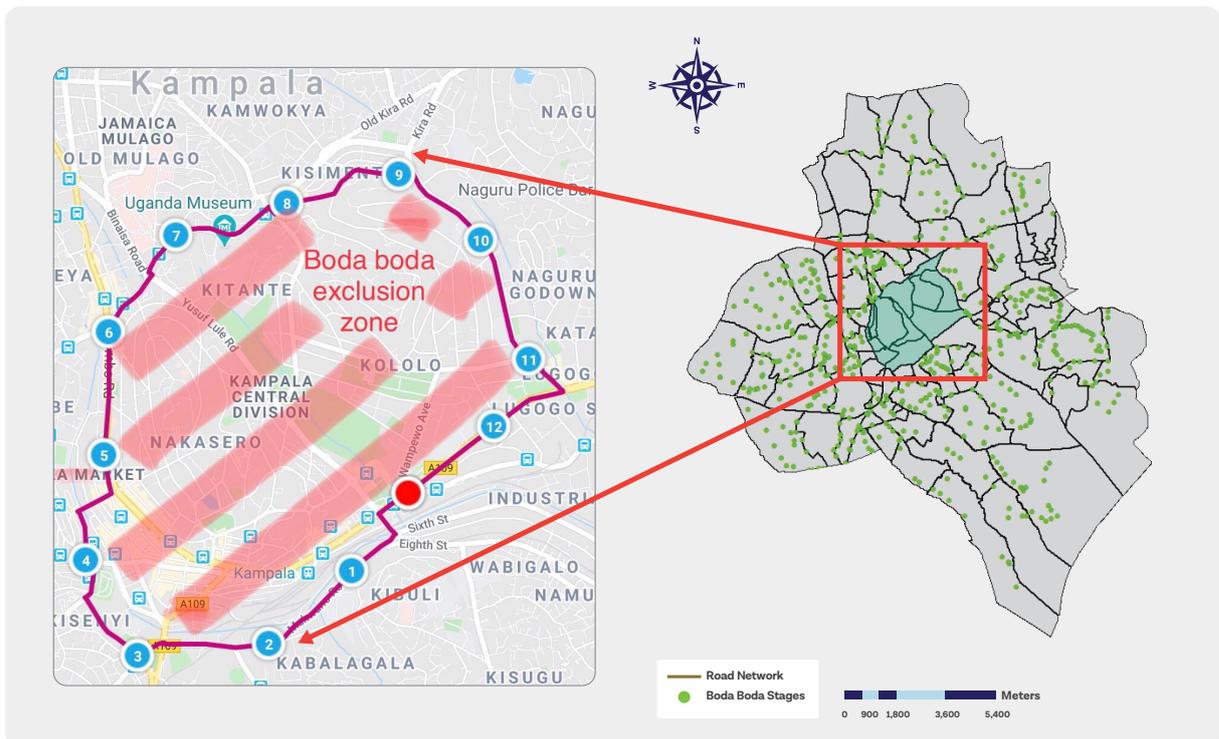
**Figure 17: Planned Boda boda free zone on Jinja Road, Kampala City**



Trying to keep the boda bodas out of Central Kampala – unsuccessfully. Photo by Philip Peter Kairu

13 At the time of writing this piece, Moses Byaruhanga was a Presidential Advisor on Political Affairs

**Figure 18: The Planned Boda boda Free Zone in Central Kampala City**



Directly following its transformation from KCC in 2011, KCCA embarked on streamlining boda boda operations. For a decade they had significantly grown in use and ownership, taking advantage of the vacuum created by a lack of mass public transport facilities in the city (KCCA, 2014). In 2013 KCCA embarked on a registration exercise of all boda bodas in the city to enable it to better plan, regulate, enforce and manage the systems of the boda boda industry (Daily Monitor, 2013). The exercise required all motorcycles to be given code numbers according to the division in which they operated and to have two helmets each, one for the passenger and one for the rider (Mukasa, 2013). This exercise, however, suffered a stillbirth when the Uganda Police intervened and suspended it (Ngwomoya, 2018) on the grounds that it posed a security threat since some boda boda operators were clashing at registration centres (Daily Monitor, 2018). This attempt and many others, most recently during the COVID-19 pandemic, have been frustrated by politicians (Daily Monitor, 2021) and fiercely opposed by the boda boda industry itself. Riders oppose them based on the fear that registration is the first step to their being pushed out of their business and livelihoods (Courtright, et al., 2021). Previous

attempts by KCCA to ban motorcycles from the city centre in 2017 were also opposed by the Uganda Police on the grounds that the new rules would lead to unemployment and insecurity (Nassereka, 2017). One boda boda association chairperson said;

*One of the mistakes government does is to come up with some plans or policies for the transport sector without first engaging those who are directly involved in the transport business because we understand it more than any other person and we can actually give government information that they want regarding the boda boda industry.*

Without the necessary mitigation strategies and measures to integrate the industry into mainstream planning processes, the boda boda industry and its associations are perpetually compromised and locked into a cycle of precarity.

## 2. RIVALRY AMONG BODA BODA ASSOCIATIONS

There is stiff competition among boda boda associations as each seeks to have absolute control over the whole boda boda industry, and this has sparked a series of fights. Other fights also arise during the creation of boda boda stages, with the most serious occurring at what are considered the most popular areas of the city. The close proximity between boda boda stages (whose riders may also be members of different associations) is a potential source of tensions between riders and can be a cause for street brawls. Indeed Okello (2020) observes that the relationships between certain boda boda associations and security officials make it difficult to tell the genuine boda boda operators from the plants. There is a boda boda ordinance currently before the KCCA council to comprehensively regulate boda boda operations across the city, though there is no law in place to enforce it or to prosecute anyone who might flout those regulations (Okello, 2020). One of the association leaders admitted that the splintering of groups is causing gridlock:

*There is a serious leadership issue in the boda boda industry because there are many rival groups and this has stagnated and disrupted the industry because most groups have sinister motives. There are more than 50 boda boda associations in the city with members paying allegiance to the group/association leaders.<sup>14</sup>*

As previously mentioned, a clear example of this is Boda Boda 2010, the association-turned-cartel which terrorised, tortured and extorted money from other motorcycle riders supposedly as taxes, confiscating their motorbikes for failure to pay and leaving a trail of bloodshed and destruction without ever being

held accountable (Kazibwe, 2019). Armed with clubs, Boda Boda 2010 members beat up other factions and members of other associations while claiming that they were the only group authorised to lead riders in the city, and that every boda boda rider was required to be a member of their association.

Complaints lodged against the Boda Boda 2010 Association by the Uganda Police accused them of involvement in acts of violence, the arrest and torture of members of other associations, and of coerced subscription to their association as well as the confiscation and impounding of their motorcycles (Parliament of Uganda, 2017). One boda boda operator who suffered horrific injuries at the hands of Boda Boda 2010, Desderio Byamukama, is quoted by Kazibwe (2018):

*At around 9pm, I was attacked by three members of Boda Boda 2010 in Makindye as I returned home and they demanded to know where my stage was before asking that I present my membership card. When I told them I didn't have Boda Boda 2010 membership card, they ganged up against me. They threw a log in front of the boda boda to block my movement. A scuffle ensued as my attackers tried to grab my bike while I tried to hold it firmly. Before I could know, I had been cut several times in the head. I then turned to see who was cutting me and in a blink of an eye, I saw someone ready to cut off my head. I lifted my hands to try to stop him but unfortunately the panga got my hand and it was chopped off. I fell to the ground and my attackers took off with my motorbike thinking I was dead. I later regained consciousness and crawled to safety.*

14 Daily Monitor (2018)

The Internal Security Organisation (ISO) suggested that there was a racket fuelling these activities including but not limited to businessmen, police officers and LC1-level leaders. It may have been related to the theft of boda bodas, a crime which has become rampant and sometimes claims the lives of cyclists, while leaving others fearful for their lives. This is especially true for night boda boda operations, which are characteristically very dangerous as many riders are attacked after dropping off passengers.

### 3. PASSENGERS AND OTHER ROAD USERS

There is a love-hate relationship between passengers, other roads users and the boda boda riders. Many car drivers describe the boda boda industry as a menace, a chaotic spectacle of man and machine that is hard to ignore in Kampala City. According to them, boda boda riders demonstrate lawlessness, recklessness, misconduct and impunity. In defence of boda boda riders, Francis Nyarwaya; a former chairman of Kampala Metropolitan Boda Boda Association (KAMBA) poignantly stated:

*It is not a boda boda [rider] that kills but a motorcycle. The vastness of the boda boda business make us liable for all accusations of murders and crime simply because we are not united. We are not the murderers; it is the deserters from security companies hiding within the boda boda industry that are killing people. In fact, we have two categories of people in this business; those with stages and those without. Most of those referred to as lawless are those without stages, no permits, third party insurance. Otherwise, a customer can report a rider back to the stage of pick-up where they can be punished and their behaviour checked<sup>15</sup>.*

These negative perceptions, though exaggerated, have been especially reinforced by certain findings which erode the credibility and legitimacy of the industry. Nakirigya (2021) reported that 10% of boda boda riders worked while under the influence of drugs and other contraband to help them work for longer hours while not getting tired, so that they earn more. Elsewhere it is observed that army deserters and serving police officers have infiltrated the industry, creating suspicion and fear among riders (Ngwomoya, 2018). And the sheer numbers, unity of purpose and ease of movement of boda boda motorbikes all combine to instil fear and negative perceptions in commuters and other road users (Daily Nation, 2015). As bodas have become a major player, their unruliness has been reflected elsewhere in Kampala's traffic, which has become more aggressive and hasty. The 'bigger' the vehicle (or its occupants), the more right of way they accord themselves on the road. The lack of law and order on the roads has created a 'survival of the fittest' environment and boda boda riders have adapted fast to develop a 'thick skin' to be able to get around (Kibira, 2021). Another vehicle driver alluded to this relationship of necessity, saying:

*The boda boda guys are annoying when I am driving, but again, when I am rushing to cut a deal [for business purposes] what a blessing they are. I even stopped using SafeBoda riders because they respect traffic laws to the letter and most times I get late to work.*

This driver also talked about the difficulties of the relationship when it relates to safety and responsibility.

15 Lugaaju (2017)

“  
But sometimes as people who own cars, we treasure our cars more than other road users' lives. I once accidentally hit a young Boda boda rider (about 20 years old) late last year. I stopped and spoke to him calmly and gently, and even the crowds that gathered respected and commented positively on my approach. I took him to hospital (Gwatiro) where he was treated until he fully recovered. He lost his 2 upper front teeth but he forgave me because of my approach. I spent over 1.5 million Uganda shillings on his treatment. It was only his mother who wanted to extort money from me; that she was a single mother but the young man kept her at bay. We became friends with the young Boda boda rider and I check on him from time to time<sup>16</sup> .

Kibira (2021) notes that most boda boda riders are good people who come to the city to earn an honest living. However, the conditions that prevail on the roads leave no room for a weak person. Boda bodas have therefore become renegades living on the edge of the law and relying on their group numbers for protection. Subsequently, boda boda riders have;

“  
morphed into a dangerous and uncontrolled swarm of bees. As with most things, the decay started slowly, perhaps with a few riders refusing to wear their helmets. They started overloading, with bikes mean for two zipping with three, four, five, even six occupants. They kept getting away with it, so the impunity continued to grow. Traffic lights became invisible.

Road signs became poles to urinate against. Road islands became parking spots. Pedestrian walkways became boda boda highways. Somewhere, somehow, someplace, the boda boda riders met and unanimously voted to disregard the traffic rule about driving or riding on the left. They decided that they could ride on the left, on the right, in the middle, across, up, down, inside, outside, and anywhere else, in any direction and at whatever speed<sup>17</sup>

The chaos on the streets translates into grim statistics for Uganda's boda boda industry. The country is ranked number one in Africa for road deaths (29 deaths per 100,000 people, compared with the continent's average of 20.7, according to the 2021 World Bank Road Safety Country Profile Report). This further translates into the country losing a staggering estimated 10.1% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) annually as a direct result of road traffic injuries alone (Bwesigye, 2021). Boda bodas have been variously implicated as the root cause of more than 50% of this carnage. These statistics have only served to fuel negative perceptions from other road users and have therefore promoted the systemic criminalisation and delegitimisation of the boda boda industry and its attendant elements including the associations.

#### 4. OPERATIONAL SPACE AND WEATHER

Riders frequently highlight that their business requires working for many hours without the time necessarily translating into earned income. A lot of time is wasted at stages waiting for customers and consequently the average amount earned is not commensurate with the invested labour. Boda boda riders spend hours on end waiting under the equatorial sun at street corners, roundabouts or street intersections for their next passenger.

16 Informal discussion with motor vehicle driver, 18th October 2021

17 Kalinaki, 2021 and Namale, 2018

They may take three passengers at once if they are lucky- this means a large amount of cash. But they might also be unlucky and spend hours waiting in vain, as competition is fierce nowadays (Baan, 2020). It is not just the hot sun but also the rain which disturbs them, seriously hampering their work. Rain curtails movement and passenger numbers fall drastically. Safety on the roads is also compromised (Salmon, 2020), leaving riders to wait idly for as many hours as a storm might last. However, studies elsewhere, such as Jaligot, et al., (2017) showed that rains tended to increase the level of activity of boda boda riders over short distances and this requires deeper examination in the GKMA. Another challenge is that the current road infrastructure has not been designed to cater for motorcycles at all. The design of the GKMA's road infrastructure is focused on vehicles with four or more wheels, leaving boda boda

riders to fend for themselves. The infrastructure is not segregated and riders are forced to arbitrarily create stages and lanes without consideration for safety, capacity or traffic flow patterns and volumes.

## **5. CRIMINAL ELEMENTS**

Adding further complexity to the above are externalities including a latent risk of violent and criminal urban elements. Rising and unchecked levels of criminal activity that have crept into the sector present serious challenges in relation to client safety and security. Violent elements masquerading as riders target passengers (mostly women and girls), violate basic human rights, denigrate personal dignity and perpetuate an environment of fear, insecurity, mistrust and suspicion, all of which do not bode well for the stability of members' livelihoods.

## **3.6 ORGANISATIONAL OUTCOMES OF BODA BODA ASSOCIATIONS AND HOW THEY BUILD SOCIAL CAPITAL**

When interviewed, chairpersons and boda riders pointed out that there were several reasons that helped boda riders to decide whether to join associations or not. The multi-functional nature of many boda associations plays an important role in influencing boda riders to join or stay clear of boda associations. Boda associations operate as 'hybrid' entities with many faces. They have taken on multiple roles that transcend their primary function as a means of mobilising their membership to amplify their voice in decision-making processes.

### **3.6.1 SPACES OF ENCOUNTERS**

Boda boda associations are spaces that facilitate all manner of interactions or encounters for their members as they seek out possibilities and opportunities for upward mobility. Through these spaces of like-minded individuals boda boda riders, most of whom have dependents, can access and rely on vital networks for socio-economic support to fulfil obligations including but not limited to care, transport and education. Although the dominant narrative has been the stigmatisation of organised boda boda groups, especially in public debates such as during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and in addition to being subjected to all manner of restrictions by state bodies, it is an overlooked fact that these associations act as critical support systems for the multitude of riders who have no access to health insurance, financial credit or a legitimate platform to voice their views and meaningfully participate in decision-making processes that ultimately have a profound impact on their socio-economic welfare. These associations are important sites of multiple-actor convergence and interaction. Riders who have membership in these associations are able to connect with and build relationships with powerful elites, influential decision-makers and politicians, power-brokers and civil society organisations, to advance their collective agenda as a group that largely remains on the margins of development processes or merely exploited for political mileage in cities like Kampala. Such opportunities are often not available to riders who operate freelance without affiliation to any kind of association or group.

### 3.6.2 INFRASTRUCTURES OF ECONOMIC SURVIVAL

In a radical sense, boda associations are the main means of economic survival for many different groups. Thousands of disenfranchised boda riders, of whom the majority are part of a burgeoning young urban population with little other access to gainful employment, are now indirectly dependent on the associations to secure their livelihoods in the precarious environment they find themselves in. These infrastructures have become the lifeline or “spatial anchors” for such groups in Kampala to stake their claim and right to the city. Caring for association members emerged as a central theme in discussions with boda boda groups in the GKMA. Care was closely connected to the daily practices of boda boda associations when interacting with their members in their efforts to ensure a semblance of productive lifestyles.

One of the boda boda riders stated what the support of his association had meant for him:

*For close to 13 years now, while operating at this stage, I have achieved a lot both individually and by being a member of my association. I have been able to secure support from the association to buy four pieces of land back home in the village in Eastern Uganda. Though not very big, I am able to utilise them to expand my income-generating activities. I have been able to support my sibling through school, for which I and my parents are very proud. I didn't go far but my young brother has been able to finish university education with my humble support. I also purchased a small plot in Wakiso where I have put up my town house and live with my family<sup>18</sup>.*

18 Personal communication 4th October 2021

Agiresaasi (2021) interviewed a boda boda riders who described his work thus:

*I have stuck with boda boda because it is a business in which I am able to take home all my money. While working as a bank teller, I grew frustrated because I felt that taxes were eating up too much of my paycheque. I can now do more things than I was doing when I was working in the bank. You cannot make as much money as we used to make a decade ago. But at least no one goes home without anything. Although the drivers are many, the passengers are more because of the traffic jam. It is very possible to support a family by being a boda boda rider.*

Beyond mere survival, however, these associations hold enormous potential as platforms for mobilising boda riders into a more cohesive group for inclusion and integration into urban decision-making processes and the formal economy, and also for access to more equitable and inclusive urban livelihoods. With KAMBE, for example, members pay a one-off fee of UGX 20,000 for lifetime membership but the association also provides small loans to members, helping them to access formal credit, loans and driving permits, and providing other support services for its members (Manwaring and Wani, 2021). The same is true of other associations: one member offered valuable insights into the benefits they derive:

*I am able get loans and pay them back in instalments with low interest rates. To get a boda, the initial deposit was UGX 300,000 and now it's UGX 950,000/-. There are also various loans like boda loans, phone loans, gas loans and land loans. The company also vaccinated us.*

- SafeBoda Association Member

### 3.6.3 NETWORKS OF SOLIDARITY

Data also suggests that boda riders join the boda associations in part as a search for identity, to instil a sense of belonging and also to acquire a level of legitimacy. The need to find and interact with individuals who understand them and who share similar struggles, challenges and goals has played a major role in motivating boda riders to join associations. One boda boda rider who appeared to be a very active member in his association said:

*Our association for the most part acts as a security network to sieve out the badly behaved boda boda riders from operating in Kampala City. Most boda bodas involved in crime have fake number plates superimposed on the original number plates and tied with a tight rubber band. In fact, we work closely with stage chairmen to identify suspects that commit crime across the city. We want to save the image of our business<sup>19</sup>.*

The above shared experience exemplifies the character of social capital and how it operates within seemingly mundane informal mobility infrastructures. However, the highly informal nature of most associations has made them vulnerable to misuse. Association leaders are generally not accountable to members and much of their interests involve members complying with the registration and operation procedures of each stage, which generally means payment of a stage fee. For this reason, the associations do not really address working conditions or rights but instead merely offer informal social security to members. The informal nature of these associations appears to be in both directions, though.

Most boda boda riders value the personal autonomy they retain in such informal arrangements and they do not want to lose it through formalisation and regulation (Munu, 2019).

Boda boda riders have a sense of brotherhood for one another and can often be seen waving to their colleagues. If any of their members has an issue with any other road user, the other road user is summarily judged to be the guilty party irrespective of the circumstances that occasioned the issue. Groups of riders materialise seemingly out of nowhere and can easily gang up against other motorists and force them to pay for damage to the boda boda even when the driver of the car was not at fault. It is common knowledge that if a car collides with a motorcycle or vice versa, the car owner is in substantial danger of being lynched by boda boda riders. Other car drivers are forced to part with vehicle parts like wing mirrors or headlights when they can't pay. Unfortunately, this is the "dark side" of rider solidarity and it receives greater attention than anything else. They have embraced the labour union mantra of 'an injury to one is an injury to all' in every sense, without the implied duty of verifying whether or not such injury was self-inflicted or their members was actually the one that injured the other party.

### 3.6.4 PATHWAYS FOR FINANCIAL INCLUSION OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND INSURANCE AGENTS

Youth empowerment is based on the belief that young people are the best resource for promoting development and that they are the agents of change in meeting their own challenges and solving their own problems (MSYA, 2007). The boda boda industry provides much-needed informal employment for multitudes of young Ugandans, who are also members of the many boda boda associations operating in the GKMA.

19 Personal communication on 5th September 2021

With many associations registered as legally recognised SACCOs, boda boda associations provide avenues for young people with common or diverse backgrounds to begin to accumulate savings. The boda boda associations also act as guarantors and provide joint liability which enables young people to overcome the challenges of collateral security usually demanded by formal banks and other credit institutions. In the same way, they act as “insurance” for their members to obtain licences from KCCA, in addition to providing protection and assistance when members get ensnared by law enforcers from KCCA and the Uganda Police, or when they are involved

in accidents. Their small savings can also be used to access credit facilities from formal financial institutions like commercial banks. The income generated by the associations helps members to build better homes, to feed and clothe themselves, to educate their children and to take care of their medical expenses. These associations play critical roles in mobilising, organising and sensitising boda boda riders in their work in a bid to improving their welfare by agitating for riders’ rights to access employment opportunities and fighting against exploitation and mistreatment.

## **3.7 GENDER COMPOSITION, NORMS, DYNAMICS AND EXPERIENCES**

### **3.7.1 GENDER COMPOSITION**

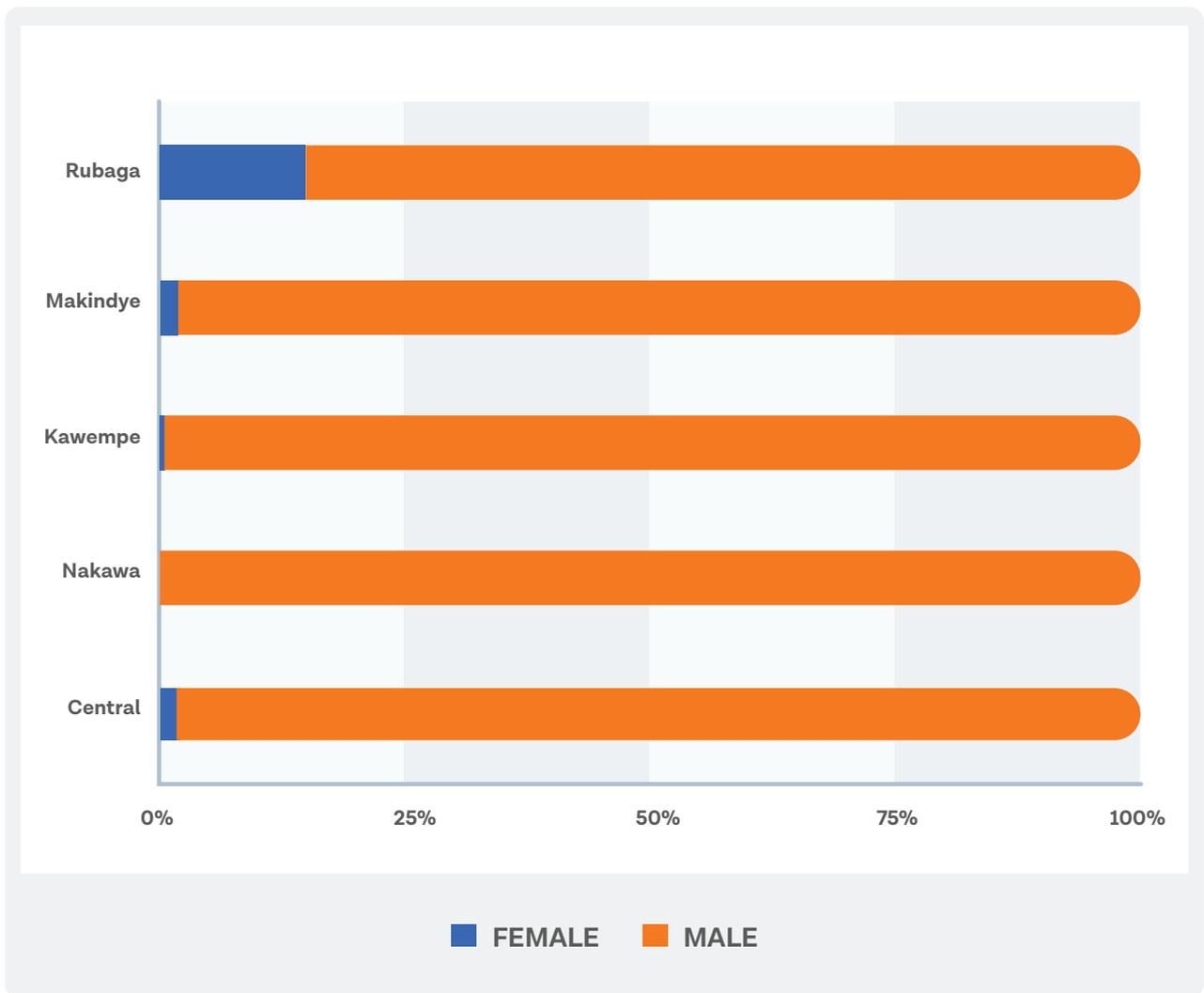
Data from fieldwork indicates that membership in the vast majority of boda boda associations operating in Kampala is dominated by men. Associations remain largely male-led as well, as is corroborated by fieldwork notes which indicated that all the chairpersons from the associations that were interviewed were men. The small number of women who have been able to penetrate these associations remain largely on the periphery at best, playing supporting roles as administrators. Elsewhere, the promise of accessing finance has been a strong motivation for other female members to join the boda boda associations, particularly those that are registered as SACCOs.

Although boda associations remain dominated by men (Figure 19), women are increasingly making in-roads in other ways. A few women are working as riders, essentially challenging the notion that the boda business is a preserve for men. The female riders engaged during the research viewed the boda business just like any other business that could be done by anyone successfully regardless of their gender. Notably, recognising female riders was difficult since they dress like their male counterparts. This occupational adaptation was attributed partly to attempts by female riders to safeguard themselves against acts of sexual harassment, and more importantly, violence, precipitated by gender work stereotyping.

All the female boda riders engaged in the study owned their motorcycles. They acquired them through the loan system of SafeBoda. These female riders were registered as members with stages but they preferred to work with Safeboda as a more efficient way of reaching customers rather than sitting and waiting for them. None of them belonged to any of the larger mainstream boda associations because they did not consider it important. In addition, from the accounts of chairpersons engaged during the study, there are many women indirectly involved in the SACCO-registered boda associations. The motivation behind their joining SACCO-registered boda associations was primarily to save and access credit. Others joined these associations as entry points through which they could buy and hire out motorcycles to male riders, to diversify their incomes. A small number of women in these associations are employed as administrators (usually secretaries or SACCO managers).

Generally, the few women who have entered the boda industry in Kampala face many challenges ranging from outright discrimination to non-paying passengers, in addition to being expected to juggle their more traditional roles as mothers, wives and homemakers. For those who do decide to get involved in the boda boda associations, the absence of fellow women in leadership positions has made it difficult to effectively represent their interests. There are currently no female-led boda associations in Kampala and this was explained as a possible cause for the few female boda riders. It was also singled out as a probable cause of the limited representation of their gender-specific needs.

Figure 19: Representation of women in boda boda associations





Riding a boda in a male dominated industry to support her family. Photo by Yoti Gilbert Giyo.

### 3.7.2 GENDER NORMS AND DYNAMICS IN BODA BODA ASSOCIATIONS

As indicated before, boda boda riders' operations are anchored around strategically located staging points across the city. Riders parks and wait for customers at these points, although not all adhere to this mode of operation (these stageless riders being referred to as 'Lubyanza'). These stages have informal leadership structures that are tasked with managing the day-to-day affairs of the stage in addition to taking care of their members' welfare. Patterns of gender segregation were observed in all of the boda boda groups engaged during data collection. Women are conspicuously absent in terms of their participation in boda boda associations. Women were mostly in low level administrative positions unless they were riders or owned motorcycles. This under-representation of women in both association operations (service delivery) and decision-making is corroborated by Muhaza et al., (2021). Their under-representation in this regard was attributed to barriers including negative public perceptions, entrenched gender stereotypes, difficult working conditions associated with the paratransit sector and lack of access to financial resources.

A female boda boda rider working in Kampala noted that:

*One boda boda guy abused me that us women have invaded their business now and it's going to be spoiled, he was tough and blaming me..."*

Another female rider gave her reasons for the absence of women in the industry:

*There are few ladies because they fear how hectic the job is and the risk it comes with, for example boda bodas are always at risk of murders, accidents and police brutality. Their husbands also fear for their wives to be hit on by other men."*

Others shared similar gender-stereotypical opinions about the lack of women in the boda boda business:

*I think most men won't let them; they fear that their wives would cheat.*

*A lot of ladies have not gotten engaged in this job because men harass them."*

*I'd say it's because they are faint-hearted- this job is high risk and anything can happen to you."*

Female riders were considered to be uniquely positioned from an experiential perspective and knowledge of community terrains to offer transport services to especially vulnerable client groups such as women and girls who are exposed to frequent gender-based harassment (Bradley, 2014). According to the chairpersons of the different boda boda associations that were engaged in this study, aside from the handful of female riders, a few women have been recruited as administrators taking on tasks including record/book keeping, managing offices and in some cases handling finances, because they are considered to be more diligent, trustworthy and dependable than male employees when it comes to executing these tasks. The importance of enrolling women in boda boda associations to take on these tasks is particularly significant in this context in relation to the trust capital women are perceived to hold, since most associations double as SACCOs and handling the savings of their members is a highly sensitive issue. Boda boda associations' added role as savings platforms has also attracted women who seek membership primarily to access informal financing and other accompanying benefits such as social networking opportunities. Boda boda associations have also attracted a significant number of woman boda boda entrepreneurs who join

the groups and, using their own capital, buy motorcycles which they rent out to riders. These different scenarios have created distinct norms around what roles different genders play in this context, some of which are going against more traditional societal gender expectations. The extent of these restrictive norms reveals both the scope of the challenge of recruiting women specifically into ride-hailing transport services and more broadly, into the paratransit sub-sector.

### 3.7.3 CONCERNS OF FEMALE RIDERS IN THE BODA BODA INDUSTRY AND ASSOCIATIONS

#### WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION

Female boda boda riders face various concerns including both overt and covert discrimination in their work, in addition to risks and threats ranging from passengers running off without paying, and the need to balance multiple roles as mothers, wives and entrepreneurs in an extremely difficult environment in a way that is not similarly expected of men. In interviews female riders made plausible claims of being regularly undermined and their professionalism questioned because of their gender. Gender stereotyping is a pervasive element that emerges through negative attitudes about women's riding abilities or suitability to work in the industry. Most passengers including fellow women doubt their riding skills, something which is corroborated by the high numbers of rides cancelled by clients once they realise that their driver will be female. A female rider noted:

*A customer makes a request and when I call, he tells me that he's not going to be taken by a woman. Another time, the female client who made the request just laughed and said she was not going to be carried by a woman...*

On the other hand, however, female riders reported that some clients respect and appreciate them for their work because they are perceived to be less reckless and safer riders than their male counterparts. Female riders were also being seen more positively in terms of their likelihood of being polite to passengers, and are discussed as a possible solution to female passenger safety complaints with regard to paratransit. One of the interviewed female riders said

*I often get compliments from my clients, who say they feel safer with a woman boda boda rider. There is also admiration for these women who have dared to venture into the boda boda industry. They are perceived by some as being courageous and tough since the industry is very challenging to survive in. One female rider reported that "...passengers say that we must be tough to do this kind of work."*

#### VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT

Female boda boda riders are exposed to physical and non-physical violence far more than their male contemporaries. Such violence was attributed to their fellow male colleagues and to male passengers. Women boda boda riders reported concerns about safety and security, and are wary of working at night, which affects their earning capacity as they lose out on potentially higher earnings from night work. One female rider commented that,

*I do not go out to work at night. I may have the availability and want to do it, but for fear, I prefer to avoid working nights.*

### **GENDER BIAS IN THE DESIGN OF WORKING EQUIPMENT**

Female riders were also particularly mindful of the gender biases which underpin the design of vital working tools such as the motorbike itself. According to them, the design of the motorcycle and related aspects including use, operation and maintenance were considered to be “masculine.” Pressed further to elaborate, they described having to adapt to the physical demands, for example, of kick-starting, pushing it when it runs out of fuel, and maintenance work such as changing oil.

### **UNDERREPRESENTATION IN ASSOCIATIONS**

Traditionally, women’s needs as transport users have been better considered than their needs as transport workers (IFC, 2020). This has led to neglect of the issues and concerns of female workers who operate especially in paratransit systems. The lack of women in the higher ranks of associations was also highlighted as a challenge which has culminated in the under-representation of interests and issues which are very specific to the women engaged in the boda boda industry. Female riders explained that their higher levels of vulnerability, for example, required highly-placed fellow women in leadership positions to give them a voice by coming up with solutions to address their personal safety and security concerns.

### **3.7.4 EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE BODA BODA RIDERS**

There are four known female boda boda riders on the SafeBoda ride-hailing platform who operate in the GKMA. During separate interviews they each

identified the freedom to work whenever they wanted to as the key benefit of using SafeBoda. The flexibility that this work arrangement offered was valuable in helping them to juggle other personal and domestic commitments. All the riders were married and were also the primary caregivers for their children. With SafeBoda, they are able to work according to their schedule which also includes attending to their families. The riders were also selective in terms of shift choices, with a preference for riding fewer hours than men, avoiding riding at night and not carrying cargo (because the cargo is usually heavy, unwieldy and difficult to manage). The female riders we interviewed typically work a shorter shift, usually working from 11:00am or 12:00pm until 4pm) and they fully maximised this window by avoiding waiting for customers, unlike their male counterparts. This meant that despite reducing their hours and not working during peak hours such as evenings, they appeared to be making reasonable profits. Before joining the boda industry all of the female riders interviewed in the study previously been employed in informal activities such as managing Mobile Money kiosks, performing unpaid social labour in their communities or staffing retail businesses, but described finding these jobs unfulfilling and poorly paid.

During interviews, a commonly observed characteristic across the different female riders was that they had already been passionate about riding motorcycles before they ventured into the boda boda industry. All were primarily motivated to join the boda industry by the freedom and flexibility that self-employment provided, and by the hope that it would enable them to strike a balance between work and family whilst also earning a higher income than their previous livelihood options.

Regarding motorcycle ownership, all four of the female riders we spoke to owned the motorcycles they were using, and had acquired them through the loan scheme of SafeBoda. Under this scheme, they

were making weekly repayments of UGX 118,000 each. The process for accessing the SafeBoda loan included submission of key documents including:

1. **Being registered and working with SafeBoda,**
2. **Provision of two guarantors,**
3. **Copy of a national identity card,**
4. **A deposit of UGX 300,000**

Although all of the female boda boda riders we interviewed were registered and attached to specific stages in the GKMA, they had taken up the use of SafeBoda to maximise their returns. All of them admitted that they rarely parked at their stages because they considered it to be inefficient. From the money that the different female riders had earned working in this sub-sector, they had all set up alternative income options including small businesses, to supplement their current work. Two of the riders had bought other motorcycles with support from their families and friends, which they hired out to other riders.

Aside from the handful of female boda boda riders who are now working in the GKMA's paratransit system, there are also women who are engaged in this transport sub-sector as entrepreneurs. These women, as mentioned earlier, buy motorcycles using their personal savings or with soft loans from family members or elsewhere, and they then rent them out to mostly male riders. Within these predominantly informal arrangements, the riders to whom the motorcycles are rented then pay an agreed amount or proportion of the income they earn indefinitely, or eventually buy off the motorcycles from the entrepreneurs. The modalities of these cross-gender livelihood partnerships are facets that will be critical for understanding how gender roles and interactions are impacting mobility in Southern cities like Kampala.

### **3.7.5 EXISTENCE (OR LACK THEREOF) OF WOMEN-LED BODA BODA ASSOCIATIONS**

At present there are no existing women-led boda boda associations in the GKMA. All the female riders interviewed during data collection indicated there was an urgent need for one in an industry that remains overwhelmingly male-dominated. They admitted that the lack of such leadership could probably be explained by the existence of very few female boda boda riders. Even within lower organisational ranks such as the association committees, men dominate the space and therefore are the conduits through which the power and the socio-economic and political perceptions of urban paratransit are shaped. The relatively very low numbers of female riders will continue to be a hindrance for greater inclusion of women in this transport sub-sector and will continue to delay engagement with the concerns and interests of those female riders who depend on it for a livelihood and the female passengers who need mobility services to access livelihood opportunities. Duchène (2011) rightly points out that the lack of participation of women as in the above scenario consequently means that they are less involved in decision-making processes.





Boda Boda supporters of President Museveni celebrating his election win in January 2021 for a sixth term in office. Photo by Badru Katumba



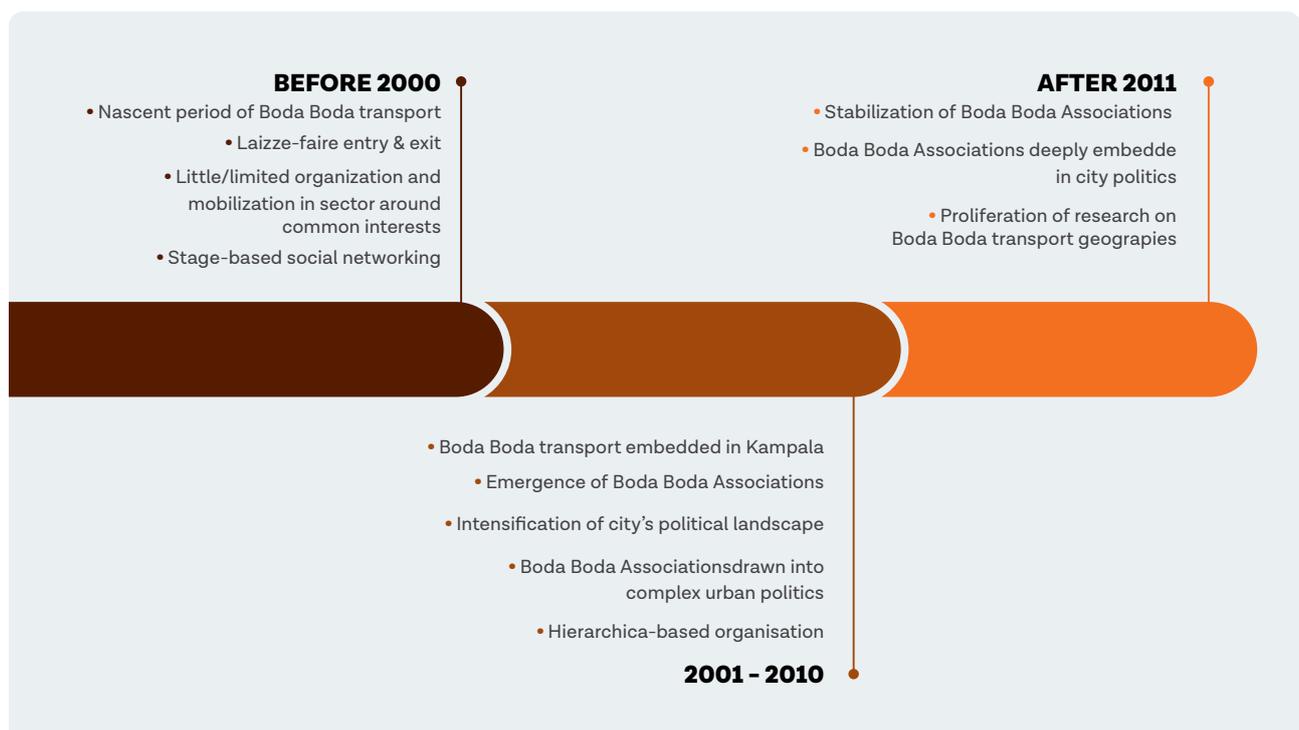
Boda Boda Supporters of opposition presidential candidate Robert Kyagulanyi, alias Bobi Wine, during an election rally in Kayunga. Photo by Badru Katumba/afp

## 4.0 THE POLITICS OF BODA BODA ASSOCIATIONS IN THE GKMA

Although evidence suggests that the politicisation of the sector was initiated much earlier by powerful politicians such as Kafumbe Mukasa, the political focus became more pronounced particularly by the President after the 2006 election (See Figure 20). This politicisation would intensify thereafter with patronage by the then Inspector General of Police (IGP) Kale Kayihura, followed by Security Minister Henry Tumukunde and other lesser-known military officers. These processes have played a significant role in rendering boda boda associations as basic social ‘survival infrastructures’ that have been easily compromised, manipulated and exploited for political gain by political interests. The result of this has been that a complex mosaic of scattered, small and obscure associations operates alongside larger, more prominent groups, with behind-the-scenes backing from a constellation of economically and politically powerful individuals with close links to the executive. Along with other factors, the politicisation of the sector has inevitably contrived to create an environment that shapes, to a greater extent, the way these info-organic/self-built associations mobilise and operate. However, it remains to be seen whether and by how much the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted them in 2020 and 2021.

Boda boda associations have become important nodes in the highly competitive arena of urban politics. Boda Boda 2010 encapsulates this more than any other group that has existed in the GKMA. It is widely believed that the association was a deliberate creation of the Uganda Police Force, and that they helped to organise its structures and even chose its leader, Abdullah Kitatta.

**Figure 20: Timeline of Evolving Organisational Dynamics of Boda Boda in Kampala**



He was previously the Chairman of the National Resistance Movement (NRM) for Rubaga Division and a police protégé, on top of being President Museveni's mobiliser in charge of boda bodas and taxis. (Hartmann and Biira, 2021; Kazibwe, 2019; Matsiko, 2018; Munu, 2019; SoftPower, 2018b; Yiga, 2014). Given the impunity with which the group operated, it became an unspoken assumption that Boda Boda 2010 was working for certain regime interests and probably enjoyed the protection of the IGP (Nakabugo, 2017). With direct access to both President Museveni and the IGP, Kitatta was able to mould his membership of boda boda riders and owners into a vigilante arm of the police (Matsiko, 2018). Consequently, they were called on to serve their patrons by helping to quell opposition demonstrations and control some gangs, and in return the police would turn a blind eye to their activities (Ibid). Those close to Uganda's politics, and in particular internal NRM party politics, knew the Boda Boda 2010 founder as a prolific party mobiliser and one of the few common men with the President's ear. (Yiga, 2014). It is clear that the association saw their protected status as being linked to their serving of partisan interests, in particular those intended to keep President Museveni in power (Hartmann and Biira, 2021).

At several points rival boda boda groups have turned vigilante, drawing parallels with militias; they stand accused of meting out violence on opponents of the ruling NRM government both real and perceived, attacking courts of law and re-arresting acquitted persons, or protesting the trials of their benefactors, enabling the regime to maintain a grip on their particular areas of influence (Ibid). Indeed, at the time Boda Boda 2010 was emerging other rival groups existed and it became Andrew Sorowen's (then-commandant of Kampala Metropolitan Police) assignment to make sure they surrendered to Boda Boda 2010 or were obliterated. Many were harassed and arrested until they surrendered or fled the city (Otim, 2018). Having been deployed to strengthen the regime's control of the city, and being supported by the government in this endeavour, Boda Boda 2010 soon turned into a militia that involved themselves in politics, committing criminal acts and violent murders with impunity as the police looked on apparently unable to intervene (Hartmann and Biira, 2021; Munu, 2019; The Independent, 2018). Their ties with the NRM acted as an incentive for the association to disregard the institutions and laws governing the operations of informal sector players in Uganda (Munu, 2019).

On frequent occasions Abdullah Kitatta, who had armed escorts and whose association leaders owned guns, pistols, army caps, machetes, iron bars, motorcycle number plates, keys and other tools of malfeasance, incited members of his association to turn rowdy and block the arrest of colleagues suspected to have committed crimes in the city. These crimes included espionage, robberies and the gruesome murders of several women and high profile individuals in the GKMA (Soft Power, 2018; 2018b). Kitatta was the dominant figure and Boda Boda 2010 was a tough group, seemingly untouchable and apparently licensed to terrorise anyone considered anti-government. It has been suggested that this sense of proximity to power is why they didn't feel the need to register under KCCA (Nakabugo, 2017).

SoftPower (2018) also reported that the association operated cells and safe houses in several areas in Kampala where they detained those who dared to cross them (The Observer Team, 2019). It was at the Munyonyo safe house that members of the association are believed to have administered a lethal injection

to accountant Francis Ekulangar before his body was burnt and dumped.<sup>20</sup> In 2017 the same association's members intercepted a bus at Busega and beat up pupils of Winter Land Primary School who were travelling to Nkumba University in Entebbe to perform at celebrations marking the annual Police Week (Nakatudde, 2017; SoftPower, 2018b).

Around 27 pupils, two teachers and ten security guards were beaten and injured during the scuffle that ensued (Nakabugo, 2017; Nakatudde, 2017). The boda boda group had demanded that the pupils change out of their red uniforms because opposition politicians had adopted red as their symbol of protest against a proposal to lift the presidential age limit from the Uganda Constitution 1995 (Ibid).

However, in 2018 the military, including the Chieftaincy of Military Intelligence (CMI) finally raided their offices in a joint operation with the Internal Security Organisation (ISO), arresting their leaders and charging them in the Military General Court Martial (Munu, 2019). The raid by security operatives recovered a number of items including motorcycles, number plates and weapons (Ibid). What was left of the association went underground and its members faded into the general boda boda population.

From the above it is clear that, while boda boda associations started out as tools of social mobilisation and organisation for those with limited access to better economic opportunities, they later took on an additional role as a means for political survival after being co-opted into city and national politics. Over time, as previous studies have shown, this collection of social infrastructures have become vital platforms which politicians, backed variously by the state and the opposition, have used to enhance their popularity and drive their different agendas. Meanwhile boda riders consider their associations as a means of access to formal credit, to save, for personal development, socio-economic support and other incentives including health insurance (for example, for members of Century Boda Boda Motorcycle Association- CEBMA) and education bursaries (for example for members of KAMBE). In this way, they have paved the way for the opening up of new pathways for approaching and understanding how the dynamics of social capital unfold when marginalised groups such as boda riders harness power, influence and resources to survive in highly politicised spaces.



Boda boda associations took an additional role as a means for political survival after being co-opted into city and national politics.

<sup>20</sup> Ekulangar was kidnapped on his way to deposit UGX 15 million in the bank. His body was discovered burnt beyond recognition in Kajjansi along Entebbe Road (Daily Monitor, 2018).





Two motorcyclists delivering food for café javas on Kira Road. Photo by Philip Peter Kairu.



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Javas

café  
Javas

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## 5.0 DIGITALISATION, COVID-19 AND BODA BODAS

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### 5.1 DIGITALISATION OF THE BODA BODA INDUSTRY

The digital platform economy has become an increasingly central actor for socioeconomic processes in cities. Service platforms such as Airbnb and Uber operate as intermediaries re-organising and transforming cities and the everyday lives of their inhabitants (Altenried et al. 2021; van Dijck et al. 2018). Service platforms as hegemonic business models realise profit not by providing services but by building digital networks between supply and demand, between workers and customers. They aim for a concentration or even monopolisation of services in terms of market share and they tend to disrupt labour markets and exacerbate exploitative working conditions (Kenney/Zysman 2020; Srnicek 2016; Woodcock/Graham 2019). Moreover, platforms that digitally mediate service provision predominantly target large cities because of their population density and the availability of both potential (and precarious) workers and customers (Sadowski 2020); they re-organise labour, service and consumption patterns and reshape social structures and everyday routines in cities (Berg et al. 2018). A gendered division of labour, neoliberal flexibility narratives as well as precarity and racial capitalism are essential features, especially for care-service platforms (Huws 2019).

The “digital economy” is defined broadly as all activities that use digitalised data or digital technologies. Services and goods within the digital economy use online platforms and app-based platforms. Over the past decade, we have seen an uptick in personal use of e-commerce and delivery, from food and pharmacies to more specialised goods, while at the same time we are seeing stores and restaurants closing down, particularly in downtown or central areas of cities where exorbitant rents prevent them from competing with online traders. The pandemic has accelerated this trend towards on-demand delivery and e-commerce. But the digital economy also includes the sharing economy, which provides peer-to-peer short term rental or labor services, such as AirBnB and Uber. The online gig economy enables people to undertake single projects or tasks called “gigs”, such as delivery services and cleaning services. The flexible working conditions of the digital economy make it easier for previously underserved populations to find jobs compared to traditional methods, though the jobs available tend to be more precarious and shorter-term (Inoue, 2019).

The digital economy consists of the economic activities that result from countless online connections amongst people, businesses, devices, data and processes. The central pillar of the digital economy is the concept of hyper-connectivity, a growing interconnectedness of people, organisations, and machines made possible by the Internet and mobile technology. Several businesses, including SafeBoda, reflect this digital economy. At the heart of the digital economy are e-payments and e-commerce as a way of exchanging and moving value, both of which SafeBoda takes part in. A decade ago it was impossible to see a future where boda boda riders embraced smart phones to do business. Ten years from now, it will be hard to find a boda boda who isn't using a smartphone (Laku, 2020). Today, digital technologies including but not limited to Payway, SafeBoda Wallet and Mobile Money platforms allow boda boda riders to easily access basic financial services and make loan payments to financial institutions. Another direct benefit of digital platforms is that they allow boda boda riders to store money in their mobile money accounts (Inoue, 2019). Online bank technologies also allow riders to receive payments from customers and commissions from platforms like SafeBoda, UberBODA and Bolt easily.

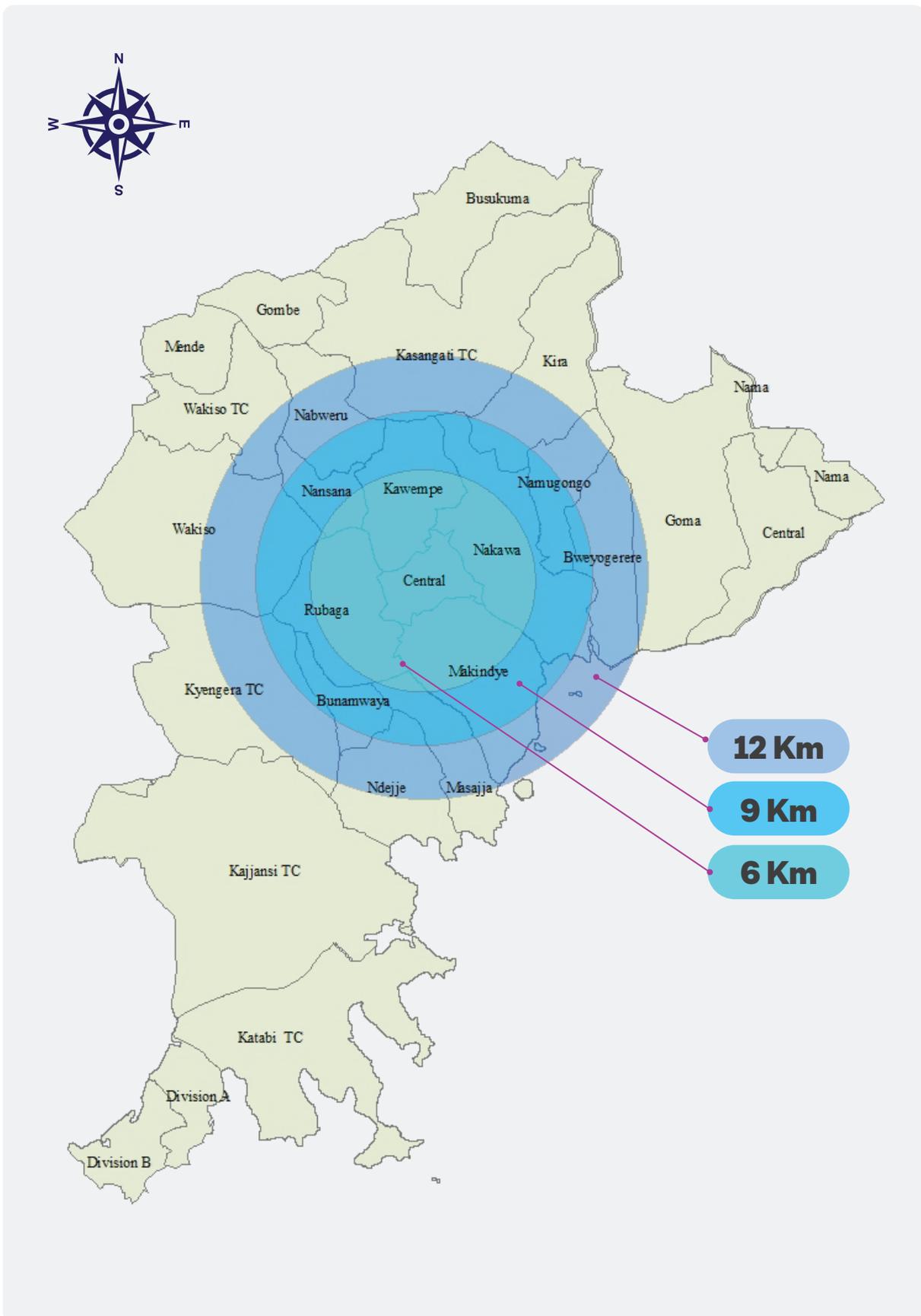
In July 2021 the government issued a framework paper in which it abruptly proposed, for reasons that were unclear, that all motor vehicles, motorcycles and water vessels in the country would be re-registered to acquire new digital number plates and a special tracking device would be installed in every vehicle (Etukuri, 2021). Some commentators were suspicious that KCCA and the Uganda Revenue Authority were conspiring, given the fact that the city and the revenue authority were both interested in identifying new revenue sources that could be taxed and boda bodas were one potential option. Political commentators meanwhile had another idea, suggesting that the measure was aimed at implementing the intelligent transport monitoring system ordered by President Yoweri Museveni to curb crime (Ibid), but also at reducing congestion by limiting boda boda access to the city's central business district (Ngwomoya, 2021b). Indeed, Wamboga (2020) argues that regular commuting is largely a function of time and costs, and it is traffic jams which make it more lucrative to hail a boda boda. Consequently, denying the motorcycle entrepreneurs access to the most clogged parts of the city may reduce their appeal especially for wealthier segments of society.

Within the central part of Kampala city and at critical road intersections where traffic can barely move during peak hours, boda bodas lend full credence to the possibilities of reduced time of travel as espoused by Cesar Marchetti<sup>21</sup>. He argued that although forms of planning and transportation may change, and although some people live in villages and others in cities, people gradually adjust their lives to their conditions (including the location of their homes relative to their workplaces) such that the average travel time stays approximately constant. In Kampala City, the average commute time is 42 minutes by car and 50 minutes by commuter taxi (KCCA, 2018) which is already pulling against Marchetti's proposed limit. Our commuting map (Figure 21) which was derived from key interviews with commuters in the GKMA shows that 30 minutes on a commuter taxi may not get any traveler much further than six kilometres (4 kilometres less than that observed by Marchetti). In 60 and 90 minutes, commuters can only reach a maximum of 9 and 12 kilometres respectively.

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21 Italian physicist Cesar Marchetti argued that people allocate a fixed amount of time to transit. Called the Marchetti constant, it refers to the average time spent by a person for commuting each day. He claimed that the single hour is the basic limit for the total amount of travel that humans have been willing to put up with each day since the dawn of human history. No matter how much transport systems improve, the average time we spend commuting stays the same- Its value is approximately one hour, or half an hour each way. This is similar to what Zahavi called the 'constant travel time budget'- a stable daily amount of time that people make available for travel

**Figure 21: Areas and distances in the GKMA that can be reached in 30, 60 and 90 minutes**



## 5.2 COVID-19'S IMPACT ON THE BODA BODA INDUSTRY

Most boda boda riders survive solely by carrying passengers, and telling boda boda riders that they shouldn't carry passengers is nearly synonymous with telling them to not ride at all (Courtright, 2021b). It was not until very recently, during the COVID-19 lockdown, that a number of boda boda riders pivoted to logistics and their share of goods deliveries increased substantially.

As per the Presidential directives following the COVID-19 pandemic, boda boda riders were only allowed to engage in cargo transportation and the transportation of sick passengers (with valid documents authorising their movement). However, cargo transportation or delivery work was insufficient to compensate for the lost passenger work and any support that would usually have been given by other members of social networks was also lost as everyone struggled during the lockdown economy (Courtright, 2021b).

Many riders saw their incomes shrink significantly, as most of their income came from carrying passengers, transporting children to and from school, and sometimes renting out their motorcycles.

Many of the boda boda stages were strategically located in front of shops and other commercial premises, bars, hotels, lodges, education institutions etc. and since these businesses had been halted, the clientele of the boda boda riders reduced by at least 80%. With the closure of passenger transportation and education institutions, boda bodas' business crumbled and their earnings were reduced substantially.

During the dusk-to-dawn curfew and the lockdown period (which includes some of the busiest and most profitable hours) some motorbikes were taken back by their owners, and for those riders who earned their living by hiring motorcycles from fellow riders (paying a road toll or kibalawa/Ekisanja), the situation was dire. The lockdown derailed tens of thousands of boda boda operators, many of them young people who had to grapple with both coronavirus restrictions and the prospect of plunging back into a job market that historically had held scarce opportunities. Indeed, the pandemic heightened concerns about jobless young people (Agiresaasi, 2021). When inter-district movements were banned during the lockdown, boda boda stages located at major entry points to the GKMA were also banned. Consequently, boda boda riders couldn't ride across districts to access food supplies either from their kitchen gardens or from relatives living in distant places. Lockdown measures such as restrictions on movement and stay-at-home guidelines impacted business flows, cutting off hundreds of informal market vendors from their usual customers, affecting incomes and straining sustenance of livelihoods, with many struggling citizens to stay afloat. The lockdown also disrupted trade and affected the business operations and supply chains of key sectors of the economy (UNDP, 2020). The involvement of boda boda riders, the logistics component for end-to-end order fulfilment and last mile distribution networks within the e-commerce ecosystem, was also affected.

## 5.3 OPERATIONAL MODES FOR DIGITAL BODA BODA LOGISTICS

Courtright (2021) recognises three operational models for boda boda riders across the GKMA. These include:

1. **Traditional stage-based drivers.** These drivers diversify their work from solely relying on passengers to picking and delivery of goods/cargo and information. The items to be carried can be as small and light as an envelope, or as large and cumbersome as a disassembled bed frame, or as remarkable as another motorcycle.
2. **App-based drivers.** These receive online trip requests everywhere around town. Some of them prefer to work full-time with the apps.
3. **Formally employed riders.** This model is typically used for boda boda deliveries. It can be either app-based or non-app based and is a formal employer-employee model. Riders in this category are totally dependent on an employer who provides their motorcycle, accessories, fuel and maintenance, and pays a monthly salary to the riders, who use the motorcycles to carry out deliveries. A prime example is the restaurant chain Café Javas, which is very active in food e-commerce, and which provides branded motorcycles to drivers who are well recognised across the metropolitan area.

For many boda boda riders there were three possible responses to the current disruptions and pressures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic:

1. **Defying the Presidential Directive and braving the wrath of law enforcement personnel including the Police, Local Defence Units (LDUs) and Uganda Peoples Defence Forces (UPDF).** With shorter working hours resulting from the nationwide curfew, boda boda earnings were down by as much as 50%, severely affecting the incomes of close to two million riders (Wadero, 2021). One of the boda boda riders who experienced the wrath of the security forces described his decision:



*We were promised food aid a number of times only to see those promises not fulfilled. Yes, I am afraid of the virus. I also know that when police or the army arrests me, I will be in problems, but hunger is a terrible thing that can also kill; that is why I took the risk and kept carrying passengers, especially in those areas where there is limited enforcement. We had to hoot at every passerby, hoping that they are potential customers. And by the way, much as we are locked down because of COVID-19, we have not had experiences directly with the virus itself- I have not registered any positive COVID-19 case within my family, friends and neighbourhood.*

2. **Pivoting to other income generating activities including but not limited to charcoal selling, house painting and petty retail.**

**3. Registering with ride hailing apps/companies to participate in the supply chain of consumer goods. Today there are at least five boda boda hailing companies operating in Kampala city: SafeBoda, Uber, Bolt (formerly Taxify), Dial Jack, inDriver, and Mondo Ride. All are new startups hoping to bring the classic mode of transport into the digital age. They are now referred to as the model for the future of motorbike transportation in Uganda (Mucunguzi, 2019). Providing the ability to hail a boda boda at the click of a smartphone appears to be disrupting the transport landscape in the metropolitan area and doing so in ways that are safe, convenient and fair to the passengers (Laku, 2020; Senthilingam, 2015). Boda boda riders are signing up and using these apps to pick customers and make money (Laku, 2020) and their quick uptake will enable boda boda riders to keep running and reaching customers even after COVID-19 ceases to define the market.**

These new models, which include automatic fare calculation and app-based trust, are expanding the possibilities for passengers ordering goods, but they are also making questionable changes to drivers' work practices and pay (Courtright, 2021c). There are over 160 Ugandan Android apps, principally offering shopping and online commercial and market services. Popular apps include Jumia (probably the most mature e-commerce and online shopping arena in Uganda), Kikuubo Online, Kikuu, OLX (Jiji), UG Unlocked, Meka, Biryani House Uganda, HelloFood [now JumiaFood], Kaymu, Kilimall, Zambale [Twambale], and Dondolo Shop. However, the uptake and usage of many of these apps remains poorly studied- data patterns indicate that online shopping is becoming a more mainstream activity for many metropolitan residents in Uganda (Kalyegira, 2021) and service greatly improved, especially during the lockdown period, which had a severe effect on travel patterns. However, searches online or visits to websites might be deceptive- while they may show a degree of interest in online shopping, it could also be for other reasons such as comparing prices. As any retailer will warn, visits to online stores don't always translate into actual purchases (Kalyegira, 2021).

Inoue (2019) in her study in Uganda observed that the digital economy directly enhances the financial capability of motorcycle drivers and their work efficiency. It also indirectly creates greater demand for motorcycle drivers in the market, including for app-linked motorcycle taxi drivers and e-commerce motorcycle delivery drivers. One crucial area she identified which needs focus if motorcycle taxi drivers are to benefit from the digital economy is the enhancement of their employability skills. Her results support other researchers' claims that although the digital economy benefits the poor, the impact is diminished due to limited digital skills in the workforce, poor regulation, and weak institutions. On the other hand, in terms of working opportunities, although there is an unfair distribution of working opportunities in the global digital economy (Graham et al., 2017), we find that (Southern) workers are gaining more working opportunities locally thanks to the expansion of digital technologies and the digital economy.

For a driver to begin working with any of these platforms, they are usually required to be in possession of up-to-date vehicle papers, licenses, a smartphone, and some level of literacy to operate the respective apps (Paul, 2020). However, the different apps offer variable amounts of training to new hires during onboarding and as ongoing investments in their workforce. One of the market leaders, SafeBoda, states that it offers its drivers extensive training in an attempt to make them the safest and most professional drivers on the streets. All drivers are trained in road safety, first aid, bike maintenance and customer care. They also carry hairnets and a spare helmet, and are identifiable and trackable through the SafeBoda system (Laku, 2020).

These ride-hailing services are also disrupting the offline market for local motorcycles. When SafeBoda officially started operations in Kampala in 2017 it almost immediately began to face competition from uberBODA and Bolt boda. All of these apps function in a similar manner: a passenger enters a pickup location into the app and sends a request to the system, and all the riders within 1.5 kilometres are notified instantly. The first rider to accept the ride is assigned it, with SafeBoda's stated aim being that it should be possible to get a ride in under five minutes

Data from ride-hailing company Bolt shows that the lowest amount accepted for carrying a passenger on a motorcycle is UGX 2,000, and that riders earn a bonus of UGX 450 per ride taken and UGX 50 per minute travelled. While ride-hailing companies argue that there are more opportunities and benefits available to riders who join their companies, our interviews showed that many boda boda riders are skeptical about the benefits of becoming members.

Other researchers conclude that non-app based boda boda riders are in a better position- they have the chance to bargain, which means they can earn more than their app-based colleagues whose pay is dictated by fare calculators (Courtright, 2021d). Indeed, there is a general feeling among the non-app based riders that app-based riders are cheated by the ride hailing companies, which depress fares as part of their strategy to gain market share by offering clients lower prices. Some app-based riders also cancel requests to protest the companies' low pricing of rides, which they feel is eating into their profits.

COVID-19 lockdowns caused significant reduction in public transport services as governments across the world acted to stop the spread of the virus. This presented a huge challenge for those whose businesses relied heavily on supplying affordable and safe mobility services, and compounded the economic, social and logistical barriers that women and young people face in accessing sexual and reproductive health services. Supply chains for reproductive health commodities were interrupted, resulting in delays in last mile delivery of essential supplies to health facilities and community distribution points (SafeBoda, 2020). Under Uganda's COVID-19 lockdown, contraceptive and other health supplies such as HIV tests, pregnancy tests and mama kits (which contain the supplies for clean, safe childbirth), were in short supply. Even before the pandemic there was a need to expand access to sexual and reproductive health services and supplies- as an example, an estimated 19% of women in Uganda want to prevent or delay pregnancy but are not using a method of contraception. The app-based economy presents remarkable opportunities in this area amongst others; healthcare supplies can now be ordered through delivery apps and delivered directly to the buyer's doorstep.

In one notable experiment the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), together with health officials, Marie Stopes and SafeBoda, and with financial support from the Embassy of Sweden in Uganda, created an e-shop for contraception and other reproductive healthcare supplies. By making the e-shop available via the widely-used SafeBoda app, organisers were able to reach an extensive user base. When a user requests an item, the app identifies the nearest pharmacy within a 7km radius where the item is in stock. A SafeBoda driver then picks up the item and delivers it to the user. Most of the e-shop's reproductive health products are subsidised and inexpensive, and free government-provided condoms can also be ordered. All delivery charges were waived during the pandemic period, and the service will continue post COVID-19 with a nominal delivery fee.

Users of the SafeBoda app say this new service is an important development, “especially [for] things we fear to order over the counter. I feel I have played a role to reach my fellow young people, because if the condoms are not in the hospital, then the young people are going to put themselves at risk. Making the condoms available to them is something I am proud of.” (Songa, Muhebwa and Abby-Farrah, 2020)

It is argued by Lukandwa (2019) that digital boda boda hailing solutions provide unmistakable benefits across the board, including but not limited to:

- 1. Digital trails which provide references for riders to access other financial services like insurance and credit facilities**
- 2. Registration and identification of riders is captured, and helps not only with regulation by government but also for traceability in the event that a rider commits a crime**
- 3. Using a verified driver with a recorded and clear pay-as-you-go model provides passengers with a sense of security. Customers are able to predetermine details such as the journey’s distance and destination, saving both the rider and customer time spent bargaining;**
- 4. At night or in unfamiliar areas the customer no longer has to go and stand on the roadside and wait for passing boda bodas**

Ride-hailing companies have also offered promotions, in one case slashing prices to as low as half of what would be normal.<sup>22</sup> Some offer free rides to new users,<sup>23</sup> and others have tried a variety of stunts to woo customers. Those who use the apps say they love them because they’re “reliable” and make travel more secure even when traveling at night, while others say they’re “convenient” and “safe”. Those who haven’t use them or rarely use them often point to the need to wait before a rider comes, preferring to stand on the roadside and hail a passing boda guy rather than waiting. Other users still prefer to take minibus taxis, which are cheaper than bodas, and then there are those who don’t know how the apps work and don’t wish to learn about them. There is also an issue of coverage; in some areas some apps can’t be used or the nearest rider is a long way away. This is what has made SafeBoda so popular- they’ve been able to expand faster than their competitors so even if a client has other preferred suppliers, it is Safeboda that will be most easily accessed. For instance, when we tested the apps for different locations Taxify proved to be the cheapest, which would make it the natural choice for pocket-watching consumers.

However, the e-commerce ecosystem is not uniformly well-developed across the metropolitan area. Moreover, although many riders may be aware of companies like SafeBoda, they cannot easily join the service platforms due to their limited IT skills and knowledge (Inour, 2019). One association leader consistently observed that:

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<sup>22</sup> <https://www.sautitech.com/startups/mixed-reactions-as-safeboda-targets-taxify-in-new-promo/>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.sautitech.com/startups/new-promo-uber-piles-more-pressure-on-taxify-dial-jack-safeboda/>



*Many of the riders don't have smart phones to enable them tap into the opportunities provided by ride hailing companies to earn them extra money. What we only do is survive on interpersonal relations and trust. I have been giving out my telephone number to my clients and once I build their trust, it helps me earn an extra income. We should also think of the Ugandan who is yet to fully twig the digital world. I have also seen many of my colleagues on the ride-hailing apps complaining about high internet costs and unreliable network. Internet will not be perfect 24/7 and we are aware of those moments that would never give one a chance to order for a ride online. What is also important is that most passengers don't have the time to go online checking which cyclist is near them. They just jump on any cyclist without going through the trouble of searching online. They would simply stop any random rider on the road and get moving.<sup>24</sup>*

The resentment by traditional boda bodas towards those attached to ride-hailing companies still looms large. There are a number of reasons as to why traditional Bodas have issues with digital motorcycle taxi drivers but the most commonly mentioned is that the latter group is picking up most of the work. Traditional boda bodas say their counterparts working with the ride-hailing companies pick passengers from every location, rendering boda boda stage rules useless. Until ride-hailing companies came to Kampala, stage rules dictated that a boda boda was not supposed to carry a passenger from a stage they're not attached to when members of that stage are there. With ride-hailing apps, however, a passenger can be picked from anywhere. In addition, for most boda boda operators fares are largely dependent on social capital, so much so that an app-based model may be more of a harm than a cure (Wamboga, 2020). Indeed, in closely knit societies like Uganda where people know each other better, social capital solves the riddle of how to identify boda boda riders.

Payments may also be deferred and sometimes may be done in kind: perhaps a market vendor may have their goods delivered to the market but only pay after a day's sales, or have their rider collect the vegetables instead. Salaried employees may also pay the motorcycle rider on a month-to-month basis (Ibid). At the end of the day a traditional boda boda can earn more money from a particular trip than their digital competitors, but there are advantages to having passengers call you through an app instead of just waiting for them by the roadside. For instance, when a traditional boda boda takes a trip from Ntinda to Kololo they may return without a passenger but this is less likely for digital boda. This offers the digital rider a chance to recoup the additional fee his counterpart charged a passenger for the same distance.

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<sup>24</sup> Namale (2018) and Ojok (2021)

**Table 6: Agencies moving the boda boda industry into the digital economy**

<p><b>UNITED NATIONS CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT FUND (UNCDF)</b></p>	<p>UNCDF and SafeBoda provide 800 market vendors access to the SafeBoda app, where they can sell their produce while creating earning potential for the 18,000 SafeBoda riders whose source of income was affected by recent restrictions</p>
<p><b>UNITED NATIONS POPULATION FUND (UNFPA)</b></p>	<p>The delivery of essential services such as sexual, reproductive and maternal health were disrupted. UNFPA partnered with SafeBoda to reduce the effect of this.</p>
<p><b>FINCA</b></p>	<p>A mobile savings product will be made available to all 5,000 SafeBoda riders in Kampala. Through FINCA's partnership with SafeBoda riders can access credit to purchase their own motorcycles (FINCA, 2018).</p>
<p><b>UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME (UNDP)</b></p>	<p>In partnership with Jumia Food, UNDP launched an E-commerce platform to sustain supply chains for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and to connect them with consumers as part of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic (UNDP Uganda, 2020).</p>



### VALUES

Unity - Transparency - Development

### VISION:

To become a locally owned, independent Community bank for small and medium sized businesses

### MISSION:

To afford an opportunity for members to mobilize saving, provide affordable credit facilities for promotion of the social economic welfare of members

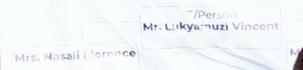
### GOALS

- To promote cooperative culture amongst members
- To mobilize members to contribute and strengthen our capital base
- To mobilize members to save from their incomes.
- To ensure safety and soundness of member funds
- To perform all functions and exercise powers designated for sacco societies under the applicable role for the benefit of the members
- To assist members to undertake income generating activities through provision of credit facilities

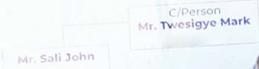
#### Executive Committee



#### Supervisory Committee



#### Vetting Committee



"Togetherness leads to Success"

Administering a Boda Boda SACCO promoting cooperation, savings and income generation in Kitalanga Village. Photo by Yoti Gilbert Giyo



## 6.0 TOWARDS MORE RESILIENT WELFARE OUTCOMES OF BODA BODA ASSOCIATIONS

### 6.1 REGULATION FROM (IN) FORMALITY

The boda boda industry is here to stay for the foreseeable future and its economic importance means that there is a need to organise it. Based on the economic role it plays in urban life, the regularisation of the boda boda industry through associations is very urgent. The current state of informality in which the boda boda associations operate should be handled appropriately by the relevant authorities including but not limited to the Inter-Ministerial and Agency Committee involving Kampala Capital City Authority and surrounding municipalities, the Uganda Police and other security forces, the Ministries of Works and Transport, Security, Gender, Labour and Social Development, Internal Affairs, and others. Proportionate and appropriate regulation can empower these associations to play a critical role as sound, effective and independent actors in urban decision-making processes, overseeing self-regulation of the industry and, most importantly, genuinely representing the specific interests of their members.

In summary, the character of boda boda associations is presently defined by:

1. **Continuous soliciting for state, institutional and elite patronage (from police, politicians, president etc.) and subsequent exploitation for political gain**
2. **Informal collective bargaining and negotiation**
3. **Attempts at formalisation and self-regulation (registration as associations with constitutions, certificates of registration, resolutions and physical addresses, and SACCOs with bylaws)**
4. **Continuous negotiation and bargaining through local social networks amongst themselves as competing/rival associations**
5. **Financial resource accumulation through savings, contributions and collections**

The above key points, though not exhaustive, exemplify the character of social capital and how it operates under seemingly mundane informal mobility infrastructures. With these infrastructures becoming more entrenched as a dominant means of mobility for the GKMA's residents, engaging them directly is critical for finding more appropriate, acceptable and sustainable strategies towards meeting the daily mobility needs of the city's residents while also considering the livelihoods that are sustained by these infrastructures.

## **6.2 REGISTRATION OF ALL BODA BODA RIDERS**

There is a need to register all boda boda operators across the GKMA. This should culminate in a robust database that can be used for the proper management of the boda boda sector. This registration exercise should be guided by existing laws such as the Local Government (Kampala City Council Maintenance of Law and Order) Ordinance 2006, the Traffic and Road Safety Act 1998, and the KCCA Act 2011, all of which provide for the management of traffic. Bwesigye (2021) asks broader questions including, 'Are the rules governing road usage in Kampala City too foreign to be enforced by the local authorities or are they rather too intricate for the local population to comprehend?' This also applies for boda boda operations- a code of conduct for the boda boda trade might be a more effective way of instilling respect for rules and regulations, for both newcomers and existing riders, to ensure law and order (Kibira, 2021). Many riders noted with concern that the industry received a lot of newcomers on a daily basis and it is currently unknown how many riders operate in the business in any particular area, which can lead to issues like robbery, recklessness and loss of life. Providing an analytical perspective of the issue requires creation of a database that can hold details of riders, providing a mechanism capable of tracing them after registration while also helping both customers and other riders to identify legitimate riders.

## **6.3 REVIEW EXISTING TRANSPORT POLICY AND LEGISLATION**

The city's government needs to take a proactive stance by engaging with boda boda organisations and other actors such as the Ministry of Works and Transport and Ministry of Information and Communication Technology and the Traffic Police Directory of the Uganda Police Force to review existing legislation. The review would provide the platform for identifying deficits/gaps which can then be addressed with the development of by-laws and supportive guidelines to ensure improved regulation of this transport sub-sector. These by-laws and guidelines would be the basis upon which to mediate entry into and exit from the industry along with other pertinent related issues.

## **6.4 DIGITALISATION AND ICT USAGE FOR MANAGING AND MONITORING BODA BODA OPERATIONS**

While other professions may require years of training with no guarantee of a job for graduates, boda boda riding is a service in high demand which requires a low level of formal skills. Moreover, a boda boda motorcycle is also a bona-fide form of investment: a worker who buys a boda boda and finds a rider to operate it is no different from another who opens a small shop for extra income (Kavuma, 2015). Instead of being seen merely as irritants of four-wheeled motorists, boda bodas should be ignored no longer (Ibid). With this in mind, KCCA and related government agencies should not be fighting to get rid of boda bodas but rather trying as much as possible to integrate them into the urban transport system by exploiting digitalisation through relatively cheap technological applications. There have been several attempts aimed at the formalisation of the operations of the boda boda sector over time, but none of these attempts has worked. Riders appear to prefer to work outside of formal structures and certainly prefer to operate unconstrained (Laku, 2020). But there is a demonstrated need to organise the boda boda industry for better regulation by deploying remote digital applications for increasing security surveillance while ensuring the sector still retains an acceptable level of independence.

## **6.5 MOBILISATION OF BODA RIDERS INTO GROUPS/UNIONS TO IMPROVE THEIR REGULATION**

Attempts at unionisation need to be fast tracked and with the implementation of a central boda boda register and database, the recognised boda boda groups can then be engaged to represent the interests and voices of their members in the city's mainstream decision-making processes. Beyond this, the unions would provide a platform from which attempts aimed at self-regulation of the industry can emanate. The same structures can also be used to undertake detailed audits of the actual and relative contribution of the boda boda industry to the national economy, including the actual numbers and multiplier effects of boda boda operations on the livelihoods of Ugandans.

## **6.6 ATTITUDES AND MINDSETS OF PLANNING PERSONNEL**

One challenge to any serious attempt at tackling safety issues is the official attitude of derision or neglect towards boda bodas. Officials only speak about the industry (and always frame it as a problem) when the latest accident figures are released or when a major crime is committed by men riding motorcycles (Kavuma, 2015). Boda bodas might be ignored in mainstream economic development and planning policy discourses but will remain important for as long there is no alternative safe, convenient, affordable and reliable public transport system across the metropolitan area. The attitudes of planning personnel should reflect this reality.

## **6.7 STRATEGIC PLANNING TO TACKLE EXTERNALITIES SUCH AS COVID-19**

COVID-19 presents not only a health crisis but also a humanitarian and development crisis too, and is threatening to leave deep social, economic and political scars for years. It is therefore important to build the boda boda industry's capacity to harness the digital economy to expand e-commerce and participate productively in e-commerce ecosystems, to enable supply chain and business continuity, support livelihoods and enable early recovery from the pandemic (UNDP Uganda, 2020).

## **6.8 PRIORITISING CONCERNS OF FEMALE BODA BODA RIDERS ALONGSIDE FEMALE PARATRANSIT SERVICE USERS**

There are issues of significant concern to women working in the boda boda industry. These include a lack of opportunities for training and inadequate representation in boda boda associations, as well as the violence and harassment that female riders commonly face from colleagues and passengers, which the associations are not addressing. These failings have important consequences for the boda boda associations' ability to protect their current women riders, as well as their capacity to organise to protect their jobs in the face of future challenges from automation. There is therefore much more that boda boda associations should be doing to attract, retain and serve women boda boda riders. As pointed out before, women's needs as transport users are often prioritised over those of women as transport providers. Of course, the two issues intertwine, and women's access to employment is a vital aspect of their empowerment.

Women transport providers should not be forgotten, and this report shows that women's needs are not always sufficiently addressed by boda boda associations. Through listening to the views of women expressed in this report, boda boda associations should be able to formulate more inclusive strategies and action plans. Women's full economic and social contribution to the boda boda industry should be both recognised and documented. Estimates should be made of how much this could be enhanced by developing gender-responsive transport programmes.

## **6.9 INCENTIVISATION OF THE BODA BODA SECTOR TOWARDS GREATER INCLUSIVITY**

An enabling environment is essential for the inclusion of women as boda boda riders by giving incentives, finance and adequate access to credit. The reasons for women's low participation in the boda boda industry can be classified as the timing and place of work, experiences of harassment and violence, and gender stereotyping, all of which can mean women are made unwelcome when they do enter such trades, therefore affecting their retention. However, there has been little research on women's experiences of working in the boda boda industry, with the literature on women and transport typically focusing on gender differences in transport use and its limitations on women's participation in the labour market.

## **6.10 PROMOTING GREATER FEMALE INVOLVEMENT IN LEADERSHIP IN THE BODA BODA INDUSTRY**

There is a need to focus on and build women's leadership in boda boda associations through gender-sensitive structures, networks and trainings, supporting them to become active and play leadership roles. Additional support is required to enable women to break into the non-traditional roles that access to the paratransit sector presents, through measures such as ensuring access to training and promotion opportunities. This would involve directly tackling social norms that restrict women's involvement in the boda boda industry, including shifting attention to perpetrators of sexual harassment and increasing support for active bystander interventions.



Boda Bodas driving at high speed into a busy evening along Jinja Road. Photo by Yoti Gilbert Giyo



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