

LABOUR AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

RIDING ON A UNION APP

Uganda's Public Transport Workers' Digital Response to Platforms

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The public transport sector in Uganda is rapidly changing through liberalisation processes, increasing informality and the entrance of multinational platform companies.



In response, the Amalgamated Transport and General Workers' Union (ATGWU) has started to implement its own digital applications to compete with Uber and other platforms.



The union's digitalisation strategy has proven to be a useful means of increasing participation, strengthening infrastructural resources and providing service to the growing membership of informal workers.



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»**Trade Unions in Transformation 4.0**« examines unions' strategic actions to mobilize power resources in a »new world of work« in which capital uses digital technology to re-organize the labour process. The Global Trade Union Programme of the FES aims to understand how the power balance between capital and labour is impacted and how workers are responding to the threats of the digital rollback towards greater exploitation and precariousness of workers. Pursuing a dialogue and action-oriented approach, the project ultimately intends to contribute to trade unions' strategic reflections, experimentation and purposeful transformation.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Uganda's Amalgamated Transport and General Workers' Union (ATGWU) at one time nearly collapsed in terms of membership numbers mainly due to the impact of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in the 1980s, which led to an »informalisation« of the public transport industry. The entry of public transport multinationals such as Uber and Taxify in Kampala using ride-hailing apps further threatened the livelihoods of informal public transport operators due to stiff competition in the market. These challenges forced the AGTWU to make key strategic choices in order to transform itself. It embarked on an effort to affiliate a mass workers' association in the informal sector to boost its membership. The union also launched a digital app ride-hailing platform to increase its share of Kampala's boda boda (motorcycle taxis) and taxi operations amidst stiff competition from the multinationals. As a result, the AGTWU has become a trade union wielding significant power in the Ugandan transport industry (Spooner & Mwanika, 2018). Tackling this new set of challenges once again requires the [re]making of trade union agency (Fichter, 2018).

This study has sought to examine how the AGTWU implemented its revitalisation plan, while reviewing its achievements, the challenges it has experienced and lessons learnt. At the same time, it addresses the following specific questions: how has the ATGWU continued to transform itself into a robust union organisation through mobilisation and by organising informal transport workers and what factors currently exhibit the biggest pull on potential members in the sector in Uganda as well as in other African countries? Why and how has it engaged in the development of digital tools which enable it to compete in the »gig« economy? And in what ways are these processes reconfiguring the union's ability to act?

This case study used the power resources approach as its heuristic framework to analyse how strategic choices have been made to meet this new set of challenges and to reflect on how related tactics have been deployed and implemented. The power resources approach (PRA) has emerged both as a heuristic framework and as a response with which to challenge the pervasive discourse on the decline of organised labour with its narrative about unions' increasing incapacity to act and wield influence.¹

The study employed a multi-method approach, namely individual and small group interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation and review of internal documents to gather information required to address the specific research. This paper is divided into six sections beginning with the introduction. Section two presents a brief profile of the public transport industry in the Kampala metropolitan area, while the third section outlines the key achievements and challenges facing the ongoing revitalisation of the

AGTWU. The fourth section focuses on the representation and participation of women within the union, while the fifth summarises successes and lessons learnt.

2 THE PUBLIC TRANSPORT INDUSTRY IN THE KAMPALA METROPOLITAN AREA

The public transport industry in Uganda consists of four means of transportation, namely buses, taxis, motorcycle taxis (boda boda) and car-taxis (special hire). While no hard figures are available, it is estimated that taxis, buses and motorcycles, which form the bulk of the public transport supply side, account for nearly half (46%) of traffic on Uganda roads, with Kampala itself accounting for almost 80% of all Ugandan taxis in operation (GoU, 2005, Kamuhanda, 2008). It is also estimated that there are perhaps 200,000 boda-boda riders in Kampala, with the industry continuing to expand as passengers turn to motorbikes to overcome the chronic congestion and long travel times. Overall, the industry is male-dominated and the few women in the industry face gender discrimination, exploitation and sexual harassment, both from passengers and male workmates.

Other challenges facing the sector include a history of conflict and violence in the industry between rival organisations fighting for control of the stages on the one hand and between the workforce and the authorities on the other hand. There is poor regulation, an over-supply and congestion of vehicles, leading to fierce competition and exceptionally long working hours due to the »target system«, in which informally employed crews (drivers and conductors) have to pay owners a daily fee for the operation of the taxi. There are some owner-drivers or owners of small fleets, but there are also owners of large fleets whose identity remains hidden behind layers of agents and proxies. Cases of police extortion and harassment are rampant, there is a lack of respect from the authorities and the general public, precarious livelihoods, poor working conditions and high levels of crime. Despite these challenges, large numbers of people, including owners, crew members, workers in the terminals and stages along the routes and those working to service the industry (mechanics, cleaners, vendors, etc.) depend on the industry for their livelihoods in complex work relationships (Spooner et al, 2020).

3 THE ATGWU'S PROCESS OF REVITALISATION: ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES

The Amalgamated Transport and General Workers' Union (ATGWU - Uganda) traces its origins back to the first labour organisation formed in Uganda (Spooner et al, 2020) in 1938. Having undergone various transformations, today it represents workers in the transport, oil, chemical, private security and property services industries in Uganda.

The AGTWU is currently affiliated with two Global Union Federations, namely the International Transport Workers

¹ See Schmalz & Dörre, 2017; Schmalz et al, 2018; Schmalz et al, 2019; and Fichter, 2019 for more detailed discussions on the theoretical underpinnings of the PRA framework.

Federation (ITF) and Union Network International (UNI), as well as with the National Organisation of Trade Unions (NOTU) at the national level. Membership in the union is open, without discrimination against any workers within the jurisdiction of the aforementioned trades and industries. An eligible worker can join the ATGWU by signing a membership declaration form. Its key affiliates within the public transport sector include Kampala Metropolitan Boda Boda Entrepreneurs (KAMBE), Kampala Operational Taxi Stages Association (KOTSA) and Airport Taxi Services Cooperative Society.

3.1 Increase in membership of informal workers

One of the major achievements of the ATGWU is the dramatic swelling of membership within a short span of time. Surging from a membership of just over 5,000 members in 2014 to a paid-up membership of over 105,000 members by 2019, with an identified potential membership of over 500,000 (ATGWU, 2019), its strategy for revitalisation was premised on the affiliation of mass organisations of informal workers, each of which has its own associational and structural power resources. In their study, Spooner and Mwanika (2018) concluded that:

The process of transformation of the ATGWU through the affiliation of a mass membership of informal transport workers can be summarised as a union with declining associational power, but with residual structural and institutional power, combining with informal workers' associations possessing considerable associational and structural power, but with no access to institutional power. Both benefits, and the result is a union transformed into a large and potentially very powerful organisation uniting informal and formal economy workers. Both previously had limited societal power, but with the combined capabilities, this perhaps now becomes possible if the necessary transition process is successful. (p. 163).

Despite this achievement, the union's rapid membership growth has also presented new challenges which have been identified as indicating a need to design and develop acceptable service arrangements and internal reforms to address the full integration of the considerable number of informal workers who are now members. One Road Transport Committee (RTC) member highlighted the fears of formal workers about the integration process, by commenting that »if they break nut, aren't they going to take the leadership from us?« (RTC Focus Group, 30 September 2019) This reflects the concern that should the informal workers be allowed to be full members, they would with their big numbers take all positions in elections.

Another RTC member referred to the process as »our struggle to develop the union. Informal workers could come in as

associates²«. Responding, one informal worker said »... we are transport workers, why do you call us associates?« Tensions were sharp at times during the consultations, with an RTC member recalling the following:

»Actually the formal members of ATGWU were telling us that we were represented because we are associates. We said we cannot be associates. We are transport workers. We cannot be associates of a transport union. So, these guys refused and said we would rather move out unless you make our position clear as transport workers.« (RTC Focus Group, 30 September 2019).

3.2 Membership integration and participation in decision-making

However, the leadership of the union had to intermediate between different interests in order to facilitate a transition process to achieve full integration for informal workers: from associate membership to full membership. A series of workshops held by representatives of unions and associations in 2016 and 2017 led to the following recommendations: informal workers should be fully integrated through individual membership for informal workers, union member services, and informal workers' integration into the union's structures while maintaining their association. Furthermore, it was recommended that a constitutional review report be produced by the National Executive Board (NEB) and presented to the QDC (Quinquennial Delegates Conference), that a programme of regular training activities and meetings be commenced and, finally, that the Secretary General should be elected and technical staff should be appointed by the NEB. Integration processes continued following the 2018 QDC, with a series of workshops aimed at strengthening organisational efficiency and increasing membership participation.

The union's intermediating capability was deployed extensively following the close result in the election of the Secretary General. Despite these initiatives, tension between various union affiliates was still evident in October 2019, with one particular association threatening to leave the ATGWU due to polarisation over the question of who should occupy the position of Secretary General. This situation was mainly attributed to the general feeling that members were becoming more familiar with democratic decision-making and demanding greater accountability, which one interviewee put this way: »Now people appreciate any type of leadership if it has gone through a democratic process ... you just don't come and appoint, you don't ... so the process is now taking place in all associations.« (Interview 6, 5 October 2019).

By December 2018, the union had also translated its strategy for growth into a five-year strategic plan for 2019–2023

² This meant that informal workers would have less privileges compared to other formal members especially with election to union's national office and a limited number of delegates allowable during election because of them being members through affiliation of their associations and therefore not being deemed as full members.

and for the first time through active member participation. An affiliated association had also requested ATGWU support to develop its own strategic plan. In tandem, the union's leadership had an institutional capacity audit carried out with the support of the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF), which was completed in October 2019. Moreover, the union continued on its path to learning and adapting its organisational structures and routines. Its strategic plan traced out a pathway to address internal weaknesses, including infrastructural resources, organisational inefficiencies, member participation and internal cohesion to support its ambitious strategy for growth in the 2019–2023 timeframe.

3.3 Improvement in members' welfare, payment of dues and working conditions

Prior to the QDC, consultative exercises were also undertaken with the union's women, youth and informal membership constituencies focusing on issues like the provision of union services, amounts of union dues and preferred methods of payment, as well as social protection contributions. A notable phenomenon observed in this process was the variations in the level of understanding of trade unions issues among ATGWU affiliates. Participants' understanding of trade unions was considered generally good amongst KAMBE members, and there was evidence of strong internal cohesion within the association. In contrast, KOTSA participants displayed a fair understanding of trade unions, but there was less internal cohesion and a disconnect between members and the association leadership.

There was also a marked difference in union service requirements between conductors and drivers driven by the disequilibrium in power relations between taxi owners, drivers and conductors. KOTSA's female conductors specifically wanted recognition and union protection from the various forms of injustice they faced in the course of their work above and beyond sexual harassment. KOTSA and KAMBE participants cited KCCA and police harassment as well as mistreatment by vehicle-owners as areas for union intervention. All issues revolved around representation, protection from the police and challenging the dominant narrative about informal transport workers, especially boda boda cyclists, who were portrayed as rascals and undisciplined people (ATGWU Internal Document, 24 July 2017).

Participants suggested a range of possible amounts for union dues and the matter was referred to meetings between the associations' and the union's leaderships to finalise a set amount for union dues and National Social Security Fund (NSSF) contributions. KOTSA and KAMBE participants tended to prefer Money Mobile as the method of payment for union dues. It was recommended that the union explore infrastructural options to pilot collection of union dues.

3.4 The union's digital response to competition in the public transport industry

Even though affiliates like KAMBE, KOTSA and Airport Taxis Cooperative Services have been fully integrated into the ATGWU, they have so far developed their digital response separately with the help of the ATGWU. Nevertheless, a discussion is ongoing and there is optimism that an integrated system will be established with capacities to merge and manage all apps into one that is managed centrally for ease of operations and reduce cost for each group.

a) KAMBE's ride-hailing and digital membership application

KAMBE traces its origins back to the National Federation for Professional Cyclist Network (NFPC), which was registered in 2009. Mired in conflicts and squabbles, the NFPC eventually disintegrated, with a few members then deciding in 2014 to form an association of boda boda riders, dubbing it KAMBA. In the process of mobilising membership and after seeking advice from various offices, however, KAMBA was registered in 2015 as a cooperative society and the name changed to KAMBE. Upon registration, KAMBE had 565 members and one office. KAMBE SACCO³ has been able to expand to 5 branch offices and 48,000 members. It operates mainly in the Kampala Metropolitan area. By late 2019, it had grown its membership base to 64,000. It affiliated with the ATGWU in September 2015. These two actions were pivotal to the strategic choices taken in response to the changes underway in Uganda's boda sector.

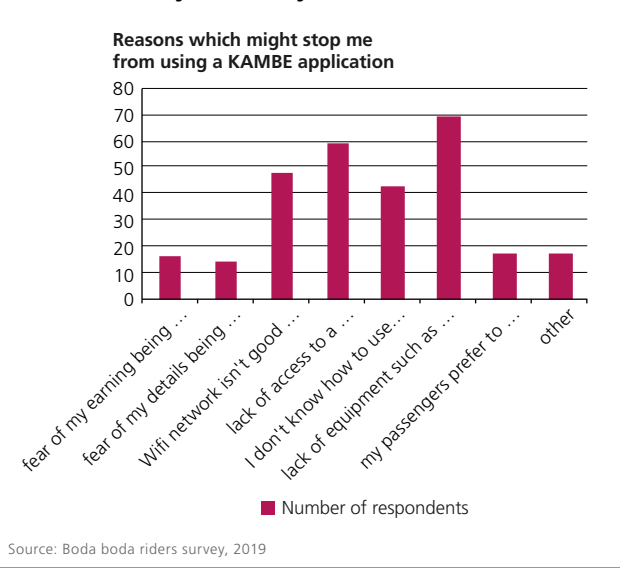
KAMBE's leadership observed that some of the association's members had begun to join new market entrants' digital platforms and that there was a growing interest amongst the bodas to use such a technology.⁴ Diagram 3.1 shows how survey respondents rated the impact that Uber, Bolt and SafeBoda have had on their individual income generation. The average rating was 3.6 (from 0 to 10 with 10 being the greatest impact), which suggested that the impact has varied, but has not been intensive or wide-ranging for the association's bodas thus far.

By early 2018, there were already new entrants into the market. KAMBE's leadership observed the declining business occasioned by the new App companies and hence concluded that it needed to develop a KAMBE ride-hailing and courier services platform to compete with the new entrants. This was after several meetings facilitated by an official from ATGWU with support from Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES). One year after KAMBE leadership decision, a survey conducted indeed showed respondents overwhelmingly concurred that a KAMBE app would be a better option for them than the other platforms; with 90 respondents agreeing with this view and three disagreeing. Those who agreed believed they could control prices and hence offer

³ A SACCO is a cooperative whose objective is to pool savings for its members and in turn, provide them with credit facilities.

⁴ Our own survey results show that four out of ten respondents have joined Uber, SafeBoda or Bolt at some point.

Diagram 3.1
New entrants' impact on bodas' ability to make money in the city



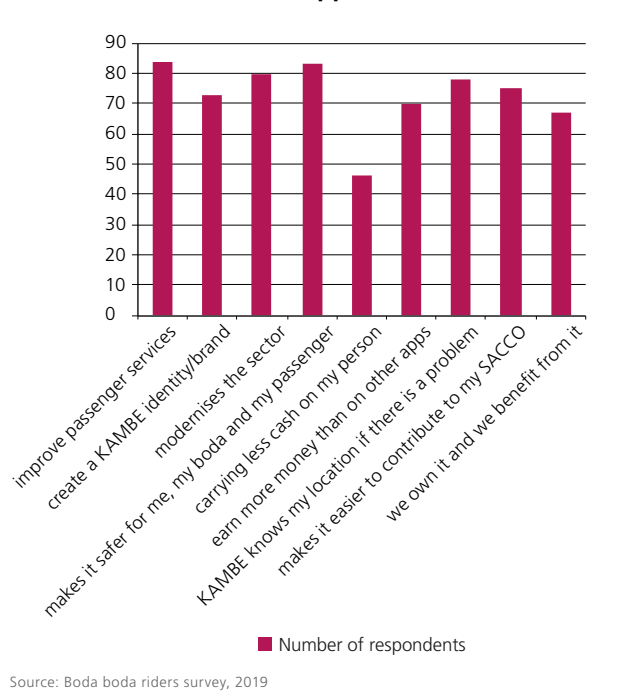
more to riders and retain less for operational costs since they were operating as a SACCO. Those who disagreed thought that KAMBE could not effectively compete with the multinationals because they lacked both financial resources and technological capacity. Even though the survey sample was small in comparison to the association's membership, it nonetheless indicated that intermediation was at play and that leadership and members had been active in building a consensus around a digital response to the challenges they faced. This led to the emergence of a collective interest in a KAMBE platform application as a strategic choice with which to move forward.

There are indications that framing capabilities were also being utilised. Diagram 3.2 illustrates the range of reasons the bodas cited for using a KAMBE app. The lowest response rate was for carrying less cash on one's person, while the highest response rates related to improved passenger services and safety for the boda, motorcycle and passenger.

The union has an opportunity to define a proactive agenda and present an alternative to the dominant narrative about bodas. Initiatives such as the KAMBE app also demonstrate potential channels for these newer groups of union members to express their views on a range of issues affecting them within the sector - for example, police harassment and what they think should be done to address this and other issues.

As a SACCO, KAMBE had a number of strategic partnerships, including its role acting as agent for Centenary Rural Development Bank. This enabled KAMBE to secure the Bank's backing to develop the app, which was to include a banking functionality. The association simultaneously sought to secure intra-union support for the initiative. This led the union to then access its broader networks to canvass support, including from international actors like the FES and ITF. Union embeddedness in such differing types of networks

Diagram 3.2
Reasons to use a KAMBE application



required new sets of intermediating capabilities. These were capable of arbitrating between contrasting repertoires of action by the different types of actors involved, and an IT consultant subsequently was selected who had experience working with SACCOs.

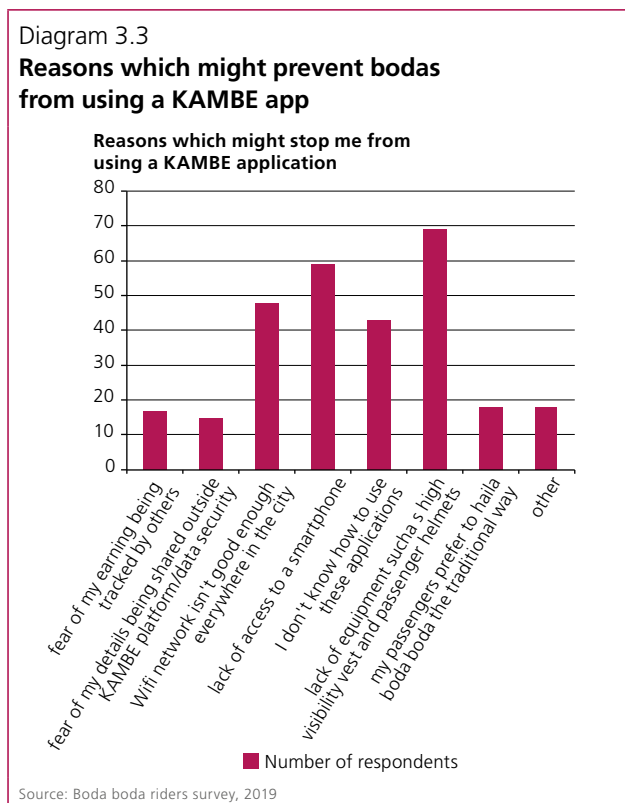
The consultant proceeded to develop several tools, including the back-office requirements that managed the financial records, member data, and related reports. Centenary Bank was approached to provide the hardware in the form of computers for KAMBE's branch offices, which had until then lacked adequate facilities. Training was arranged and provided by both the Bank and the IT consultant on how to operate the back-office systems. The back office is operational and is used on a daily basis by KAMBE. As a result, infrastructural resources and organisational efficiency were enhanced within the association.

The app has also been developed. The boda version enables members to download the app onto their phones (android only), and within the app environment they can pay membership fees, save and withdraw funds, track transactions and performance, manage passenger and courier requests, and use the chat room. The passenger version enables passengers to push out requests and track their payments in real time. The app has been tested. It cannot be activated at present, however.

Despite this, it has emerged that there are a range of other factors which either were not identified or whose impact was underestimated during the concept and planning phases, with financial and budgetary impediments turning out to be an overarching factor. Rolling out the App requires a lot of financial resources and a robust marketing approach, which KAMBE did not have at the time. Moreover, KAMBE

also underestimated competition from its opponents. Although it reached out to the centenary bank for assistance, the bank had not committed to supporting them by the time of this study.

Furthermore, even though bodas' access to smartphones is an essential component to the strategy's success, the survey results suggested that only 40% of respondents own a smartphone and, as diagram 3.3 highlights, lack of access to a smartphone had a high response rate in terms of being cited as a reason to prevent a boda from using the KAMBE app. This is also an issue which KAMBE's leadership are aware of, and they are assessing options to increase access to smartphones for members. The leaders are negotiating with a provider to purchase smartphones and exercising influence in the negotiations through their SACCO status. Other reasons cited by survey respondents which also had a high response rate included not knowing how to use the platform applications, Wi-Fi connectivity and lack of equipment such as high visibility vests and passenger helmets. Branded equipment again requires a huge financial commitment, prompting a rethink regarding the app's launch and marketing.



In 2019, FES also facilitated a marketing and communications workshop to address this strategy component. As a consequence, there is a staged approach to going live with the digital platform involving 1000 bodas in the initial launch phase. Marketing will begin on a low-key note and will involve accessing already-open channels of communication and social networks in which the association is already embedded. Organisational learning and flexibility have been critical resources driving innovation and helping chart these new courses of collective action.

b) The airport taxi services cooperative society's digital application: harnessing the union's structural power resources

In the last few years, Entebbe's Airport Taxi Services Cooperative Society, which is also an association affiliated with the ATGWU, has faced increased competition from Uber at the airport, with Uber at one point offered some ATGWU members free Uber smartphones. To address these new threats, the association made a strategic choice to access the union's structural, institutional and associational power resources. The ATGWU continues to hold considerable structural power through workplace bargaining, circulatory and multiplicative power in key workplaces in Uganda's aviation industry; namely, at the CAA and Entebbe Airport. These workplaces remain the ATGWU's core formal economy power base (Spooner & Mwanika, 2018). Accessing the union's institutional and associational power resources, the association's leadership have leveraged their relations with these industry stakeholders, which have further developed through the collective bargaining processes, leveraging their relations with workplace trade union leaders within the union's aviation sector.

The association lobbied the Entebbe Airport commercial services department regarding Uber's activities at the airport and its impact on its members' livelihoods, initially with limited success. However, things changed after a meeting with CAA management, at which the association was encouraged to develop its own commercial digital app, which could be used and marketed at Entebbe Airport, subject to this first receiving CAA approval. This proposal was based on the CCA's interest in understanding how the association's current analogue and digital systems generate business. This followed from a number of visits to other airports which had introduced digitalised taxi services, and the CAA wished to ensure that such services were available at Entebbe Airport and of an equal standard to that which it had observed elsewhere.

Over a fifteen-month period and with guidance from the CAA's commercial services department, and later on from specific ATGWU staff, the association developed its own airport taxi digital application. It is designed to accommodate both commercial and union services for the association's members. In January 2020, the association's digital application received the required approval from the CAA's management. A launch date has now been set. We later learnt that it has been further delayed due to the ongoing Corona-19 pandemic. The application's development process has also identified a number of challenges which will be explored later.

c) Commercial KOTSA digital application: building a digitalisation consensus and infrastructure capabilities

Kampala Operational Taxi Stages' Association (KOTSA) was established in 2015 after a protracted struggle among different organisations which were trying to take over the

taxi business. The formation of KOTSA was a result of a leadership vacuum that was created after the KCCA took over management and collection of revenue from UTODA. As Kampala is the terminal point of all destinations country-wide, and given the fact that the taxi industry covers almost 80% of public transport, KOTSA therefore operates from Kampala and up country. The organisation covers the whole country when it comes to transport of passengers.

Just like KAMBE and the airport taxi association, KOTSA, which is also an affiliate of the AGTWU, has also faced increased competition from the likes of Uber, which launched its (car) ride-hailing app in Kampala in June 2016 and Bolt (Taxify), which entered Kampala's taxi sector in late 2017. After a consultation process with its taxi membership, decisions were reached at KOTSA's Executive Board meeting in mid-2018 to develop a commercial KOTSA digital app for the following reasons: increased competition in the taxi sector from international brands such as Uber and Bolt, increased familiarity with and widespread use of technology amongst its customer base throughout the whole of Uganda⁵, to create a unique KOTSA brand, which will be an important way to change people's perceptions about taxi operators already in the sector and another tool to utilise when recruiting and organising new members into KOTSA and the ATGWU.

Despite the endorsement, there is a significant gap yet to be bridged between KOTSA's digitalised ambitions and current practices; a strategy has been devised, but its execution is on hold. As Schmalz et al (2018) reiterate, associational power is not based solely on the number of members. Other factors such as infrastructural resources, organisational efficiency, member participation and internal cohesion are crucial. Despite its considerable numbers, membership registration details and collection of union dues predominantly continue to be collated manually at the stage level, with such registers then being transferred to the ATGWU's offices, where these manual details are cross-referenced and updated on the union's membership spreadsheets.

Furthermore, KOTSA organisers⁶ have identified a range of capability challenges which continue to impede renewal processes. These include the association's limited material resources derived from membership subscriptions, which the association states are insufficient to fully support the association's activities. It is furthermore asserted that its organisational structures cannot adequately handle the pervasive presence of unscrupulous actors within the industry. However, it is also evident that the ATGWU is continuing to build a consensus (intermediation capability) for its digitali-

sation strategy across its diverse membership constituencies, which one Road Transport focus group participant described as follows:

»ATGWU is computerised. Here no. Airport taxis and KAMBE are the people who are coming up with this issue of digitizing and in KOTSA there are stages where we just send them those books and ask their numbers because this is in the initial stage. I think it is better in the future to adapt such a thing [digital app] in KOTSA and any other association that we have come up with ... the Airport taxi and KAMBE are in the process of digitising.« (Road Transport Focus Group, 30 September 2019)

4 REPRESENTATION AND PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN

Participation and membership of youth and women⁷, a key dimension in trade union renewal, took on the form of workshops and consultation meetings in December 2017 and May 2018. Such activities sought to reduce the representation gap between union leadership on the one hand and youth and female members on the other. Above all, the idea was to enable a space for these groups to freely and democratically participate in the decision-making processes besides articulating issues that affect them, for example sexual harassment against women, or work ethics (Schmalz et al, 2018). Uganda's informal public transport structure was viewed as a significant impediment for women to enter the industry. It was recommended that there should be a comprehensive education drive on gender equality and efforts to eliminate sexual harassment in tandem with advocacy work to challenge gender-based violence within the industry.

The consultation also identified internal challenges which impacted on union renewal processes, namely, a widespread lack of comprehension amongst youth members about the union's structure and decision-making processes, and communication gaps between young members and the union's leadership. Importantly, the consultation recommended the abolition of formal and informal categorisation and language usage among youth and female constituencies within the union. These recommendations were adopted in the subsequent Quinquennial Delegates Conference (QDC) held in August 2018. A case in point was the abolition of the two separate workers' committees for formal and informal workers, respectively. Instead, the union formed a single committee to equally represent women and youth in decision-making processes.

5 5.22 million smartphones were registered in Uganda by the fourth quarter of 2018. (Statistica link was used here, accessed on 15 January 2020). There were 57.27 mobile cellular subscriptions registered for every 100 Ugandans in 2018. (Statistica link was used here, accessed on 15 January 2020). In 2018, Uganda was estimated to have 18,149 million internet users (or 49.5% of the population) (CIA World Fact book).

6 ATGWU KOTSA Organizers Workshop Training, Kampala, 2-4 September 2019.

7 The ATGWU leadership structure includes specific Women and Youth Representatives on elected decision-making bodies, including the National Executive Board (NEB), Branches and Shop Stewards Councils. The NEB must be made up of a minimum of one-third women members. However, the Constitution is silent on several areas, including specific women and youth representation in delegations nominated to attend delegates' conferences and on the Council of Trustees.

Membership participation was key. Furthermore, intermediating, framing and organisational-learning capabilities were also utilised to varying degrees with respect to gender-integration processes within the union's broader strategy for growth. The union's female membership remained heavily concentrated in the civil aviation sector, where workforce breakdown by gender was estimated to be 40% men to 60% women. There were increasing numbers of female security workers, but their overall density in the sector was extremely low. Female workers throughout the road transport sector have remained predominately in administrative and support services located in and around stages and parks; there have been some female conductors and warehouse operatives, but negligible numbers of drivers. Female workers' visibility in the transport sector outside aviation has remained problematic, as one Women's Committee focus group member explained: »Yes, the informal sector has so many women working in it, but they are not yet in the union, but formal women since they come from formal shops; most of them know about the union and they have joined.« (30 September 2019)

Female membership accounts for approximately 3% of overall ATGWU membership. Whilst the NEB passed a resolution to encourage growth in women's membership, its recruitment baseline was extremely low in contrast to the phenomenal overall membership growth it had experienced during the previous five years. The resolution required each association to recruit a minimum of ten women for the union annually.

With respect to member participation, the union's NEB adhered to the 30% target for women (although co-opting was sometimes required to fulfil quotas) and the Women's Committee was fully representative of its various constituencies. The NEB Women's Representative emphasised that »we discuss issues at NEB level to ensure that, when priorities are being set, women are not left out« (Women's Committee Focus Group, 30 September 2019). The union's section committees had fair numbers of women committee members, although the Road Transport Committee revealed that it had only one female committee member. Women's representational structures have been established in the associations, including on their executive boards. However, this has been challenging, as one ATGWU Staff, Trustees and Executive Board focus group member explained:

»Before we joined, we didn't have any lady and when we were electing our leadership, we [were] advised to have a lady or ladies on board whom we didn't have and we had to pick from anywhere ... she was neither a driver nor a conductor but she used to work for KC-CA. We enticed her to join us. So, we put them on the board on the advice of the union.« (ATGWU Staff, Trustees and Executive Board focus group, 4th October 2019).

Internal cohesion was inhibited due to competing narratives within the union reflecting broader societal narratives in respect to gender and women's roles in public and private

spheres - for example, the general belief that some jobs are just made for women, and the diametrically opposite conviction that emerged in the ATGWU Staff, Trustees and Executive Board focus group (4 October 2019). Nonetheless, the union was proactive in tackling sexual harassment as well as discriminatory practices at the workplace, and sought to include gender analysis in preparing to negotiate and conclude collective bargaining agreements. In tackling sexual harassment issues identified through a KOTSA member survey, the union assigned its infrastructural resources effectively and worked with the association's leadership to address and implement measures, including creation of a disciplinary committee. The union's leadership was regarded as proactive on gender-related issues, with one Women's Committee member (Women's Committee Focus Group, 30 September 2019) commenting that »I trust ATGWU. When we propose something, it is always worked upon.«

5 SUCCESSES AND LESSONS LEARNT

Based on the preceding observations, it can be opined that the union has played a pivotal role in advancing transport unions' understanding of how to successfully organise informal workers, including the development and use of digital tools. It pioneered the use of technology in recruiting, communicating, organising and the collection of membership fees and how to apply these tools in tandem with traditional union organising. Its digital tools were designed to meet the demands of its membership, which included savings and loans, and ride-hailing services. Today, two driver-owned, digital cooperatives are on the verge of being launched. These have the potential to compete with SafeBoda, Bolt and Uber in Uganda. The digital app is also a flexible tool which can be adapted to meet the union's growing needs and in different local contexts, as its developer explains:

»We only need to create different accounts for each of the associations ... we have different associations sitting on different databases, but having a mother database managing the different databases ... and in terms of the app, we have the infrastructure; we only need to customise it to the needs of the associations because KAMBE could be different from taxis, for example. We only need to look at the mother infrastructure and then customise it to meet the needs of different unions.« (Interview 6, 5 October 2019)

There are considerable lessons to be gleaned by exploring ATGWU's digitalisation initiatives. The KAMBE experience shows how innovation and creativity can be encouraged through the combination of its cooperative and union-based strengths and networks. Its driver-owned, digital cooperative has been a popular initiative and received comprehensive backing throughout the membership. It has also demonstrated in most dramatic terms that the digital development side requires a much quicker concept with regard to the delivery timeframe as well as considerably less effort than that needed to secure the capital to actually launch the app. Notably, the backroom operations now in

place have enabled the association to significantly upgrade its infrastructural resources.

However, there are important lessons to be drawn from this initiative. Launching a driver-owned, digital cooperative is capital-intensive and requires comprehensive project management skillsets and experience, along with substantial upfront financial resources and technical staff expertise. Strategy-development, planning, risk-assessment, source-funding and budgeting, investment in training and brand-development have emerged as areas which require particular attention for other unions considering such ambitious digital initiatives. A further factor which was raised by the app developer concerned the issue of investors and the need to have an investor strategy prepared. Although the union did not think about incorporating other investors in their venture, the App developer mentioned the possibility of the App being picked by the investors: »the beauty is that there is a lot of investment around for this kind of app, because once you put it out there and people recognise this kind of innovation, investors can come in and pick it up from there« (Interview 6, 4 October 2019). Whereas there is a possibility of the decision by unions to venture into business may undermine their ability to fight for workers right, officials of ATGWU were very clear in their presentations that their role as union will be limited to defending the rights of their members while the associations such as KAMBE affiliated to them will be the ones in business. This arrangement is expected to avoid conflict of interests on the part of AGTWU while discharging their mandate.

The Airport Taxis Services Cooperative Society showed that it was able to develop a strategy with the potential to constrain Uber's influence at the airport through a combination of specific power resources and capabilities. It has digitised its union membership services and union dues collection. However, this initiative was developed in isolation from the KAMBE initiative, suggesting that internal cohesion within the union has significant gaps. Once again, the capital intensity of such initiatives has been underestimated and inexperience in procuring digital consultancy services has been evident. Other factors which have emerged as lessons for the future include the need to employ technical staff to coordinate backroom activities, identifying members' training needs wherever there are substantial numbers of members with limited smartphone know-how, and a comprehensive marketing strategy for the digital cooperative.

KOTSA's experience is the story of a union's success in framing the digitalisation agenda throughout its structure. However, it also suggests that bridging the gap between digital ambitions and the current state of play may require considerable patience and strategic planning. It further emphasises the importance of a phased and coordinated digitalisation rollout across unions with mass memberships.

One challenge which remains for the ATGWU and other unions seeking to introduce digitalised solutions as part of union renewal processes is the risk that such initiatives may

unintentionally contribute to the mobile gender gap⁸ and to a widening gender representation gap. In sub-Saharan Africa, the mobile gender gap is widest in Uganda, where 77% of men own a mobile phone, compared to 54% of Ugandan women (Mastercard Centre for Inclusive Growth, 2017). Smartphone distribution will be highest amongst male trade union members in each of the associations that have developed, or are planning to implement, platform apps within the ATGWU initiative. A further gender factor to be considered relates to the ATGWU's ambitious year-on-year membership-growth targets for 2019–2023. It is uncertain whether or not these targets form part of a concerted effort to reduce the current and substantial membership gender gap within the union through intentional association affiliations, described by one interviewee as follows:

»I think the time is now. If unions are to be relevant in the space they have to go digital. They cannot slow down because of the excuses, I would say, but at the end of the day they have to go digital. If they want to scale and deliver better services, if they want to build credibility and fast, then seamless transactions and reach to their members is the way to go to offer that kind of opportunity. In terms of cost, it can be distributed across their members.« (Interview 6, 4 October 2019)

These challenges notwithstanding, ongoing strategies for transformation like these have had some positive effects on union abilities to act besides presenting potentials for the future. The following benefits are discernible. First of all, increased membership thanks to the use of digital technology to mobilise and organise offer an opportunity for the ATGWU to expand its resource base, which it requires to undertake its operations without depending on external support. This independence is necessary for the organisation to take a position on labour issues with some confidence and level of objectivity. Secondly, by building its capacity, the organisation enhances its credibility and amplifies its voice, which means it can engage with institutional powers, especially the government and its agencies, in a manner that can elicit a positive response. Thirdly, these spaces of engagement, for example workshops, meetings and other forms of interactions witnessed during the revitalisation process, present opportunities for learning new skills (such as the art of negotiating and forwarding demands for greater accountability), which members can then use in other spaces of engagement within the realm of public affairs for the greater public good. There are other intrinsic benefits as well, for example improved self-esteem among union members, which is key factor in making one's voice heard.

⁸ See GSMA (2018) and (2019).

6 CONCLUSION

This study has sought to explore the various strategies the ATGWU used to renew itself as a trade union facing decline occasioned by the entry of transnational platform companies into the local urban transport market. The findings of the study show that this response has been multifaceted, applying a mix of associational, structural, institutional and societal power resources facilitated by various leadership capabilities. By affiliating mass organisation of informal workers in the transport sector, the union has managed to cause its membership numbers to soar from 5,000 in 2014 to 105,000 in 2019, thus enhancing its associational power. Once again, through intense mediation and consultation, it has managed to foster integration between formal and informal membership, ultimately easing tensions among various segments in addition to enhancing members' representation and participation in decision-making processes, especially among women and youth. The study findings further show that the union's revitalisation efforts have contributed to an improvement in members' welfare, payment of dues and general improvement in working conditions. The adoption of digital platforms, for example KAMBE and Airport taxi association applications seeking to facilitate membership drive-organising and mobilising along with marketing, have helped create the prospects to compete effectively with multinationals such as Safeboda, Uber and Bolt (formerly taxify).

Nevertheless, there have also been notable challenges in the course of implementing the revitalisation strategy. Apart from persistent tensions arising mainly as a result of emerging democratic avenues within the union following membership integration, development of the digital apps and their subsequent usage can be a bit problematic in the absence of adequate financial resources, marketing strategy and smart phones. These challenges notwithstanding, the successes experienced in Kampala offer an opportunity to explore the dynamics which have enabled the union to renew itself and the »platform cooperative« to compete, as well as potential for it to be adopted and wielded by trade unions in neighbouring countries and other regions. For now, what is important is for the ATGWU to consolidate the gains made while at the same time resolutely working towards addressing daunting challenges, such as inter alia bridging the gender gap, while coming up with a robust and workable marketing strategy for digital apps.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ATGWU	Amalgamated Transport and General Workers Union
BOTTAX	Boda Boda, Tuk Tuk and Taxi Workers Union
FES	Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ITF	International Transport Workers Federation
GoU	Government of Uganda
KAMBE	Kampala Metropolitan Boda Boda Entrepreneurs
KCCA	Kampala Capital City Authority
KOTSA	Kampala Operational Taxi Stages Association
MWU	Matatu Workers Union
NEB	National Executive Board
NSSF	National Social Security Fund
PUTON	Public Transport Operators Union
QDC	Quinquennial Delegates Conference
SACCO	Savings and Credit Cooperative Organisation
SJ-PTWG	Socially Just Public Transport Working Group
TAWU	Transport and Allied Workers Union
WIT	Women in Transport

LIST OF DIAGRAMS

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APPENDIX: BODA BODA STAGES' WORKERS SURVEY

BODA BODA RIDERS SURVEY / OKUNONYEREZA KU BODA BODA

October 2019

Location of Boda Boda Stage / Stage Wesangibwa:

Name / Erinnya:

Mobile phone number / Enamba ye ssimu:

Gender / Ekikula: Male / Musajja Female / Mukazi

Age / Emyaka: 16–24 25–34 35–44 45+

How many years have you been a Boda Boda rider? / Omazze emyaka emeka nga oli mu mulimu gwo kusabazza abantu ku Boda?

KAMBE member / Oli memba wa Kambe: Ye: Nedda:

Olina essimu ya smartphone: Ye: Nedda:

THEME ONE: DIGITAL APPS/PLATFORM ECONOMY / Essomo erisooka: Emitimbagaano

How likely is the arrival of Uber, SafeBoda, Taxify to impact your ability to make money in the city? Ngeri ki okujja kw'ebitongole nga Uber, Safe Boda, Taxify bino ebidukanya emirimu nga bikozessa emitimbagaano gya masimu gya kyussa kussa gyitya enfuuna yo?

Not likely / Tekyankosa Extremely Likely / Kyankosa nnyo

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Have you ever joined Uber, SafeBoda, Taxify in the past? / Wali ovugiddeko ku bitongole nga Uber, Taxify, Safe Boda nebilala?

Ye Nedda

Do you agree that a Kambe will be better for Boda Boda riders than UBER, SafeBoda or Taxify (BOLT)? Okirizza nti omutimbagaano gwa KAMBE gunaba gwa mugasso nnyo eri abavuzi okusinga gino egiriwo.

Ye Nedda

Which of the following reasons would encourage you to use a KAMBE app? Nsonga ki ku zinno wamanga eyinza okusikirizza okwegatta ku mutimbagaano gwa Kambe?

Improve services for passengers / Okutumbula empereza eri abasabazze**Creates a KAMBE identity/brand** / Okufuna brand ya Kambe**Modernises the sector** / Okulinnyisa omutindo gwo mulimu gwa boda – boda**Makes it safer for me, my motorbike and my passenger** / okuwa obukuumi eri nze omuvvuzi wa Boda – boda yange n'omusabazze**Carrying less cash on my person** / okendezza ensimbi zemba nazo ng'omuntu mu nsawo**Earn more money than using other APPS** / Nja kufuna ensimbi nyingi okusinga nga nkozessa emitimbagaano emilala**Kambe knows my location if there is a problem** / Obukulembeze bwa KAMBE bumanyi wensangibwa singa wabawo ekizibu**Makes it easier to contribute to my SACCO** / kinyanguyizza okussa ssente mu

SACCO yange

We own it and we benefit from it / Ffe bananyini era ffe tuganyurwamu

Which of the following reasons might stop you from using a KAMBE app? Nsonga ki ku zino wamanga eyinza okulemesa okwegatta ku mutimbagaano gwa KAMBE?

Fear of my earnings being tracked by others / Okutya nti effuna yange/ enyingiza egya manyibwa abalala abatali nze**Fear of my details being shared outside KAMBE platform/data security** / Okutya nti ebinkwatako biggya kumanyisibwa abalala**Wifi network isn't good everywhere in the city** / Network ssinungi wonna mu kibuga**Lack of access to a smartphone** / Obutaba na smartphone**I don't know how to use these APPS** / Obutamanya kozessa mitimbagaano**Lack of equipment such as high visibility vests and passenger helmets** / Obutaba na bikozessbwa gambaga reflector jackets ne passenger helmet za basabazze**My passengers prefer to hail a Boda Boda the traditional way** / Abasabazze bange bakyayagala okozesa enkola enkadde**Other, please give reason** / Ensonga endala yonna

THEME TWO / ESSOMO ELY'OKUBIRI: UNION MEMBERSHIP

Your association, KAMBE, is affiliated to the ATGWU. TRUE FALSE

Ekibiina kyo ekya KAMBE, kyegata ku kibiina kya bakozi ekya ATGWU

I am an ATGWU member / Ndi memba wa ATGWU Yes / Yes No / Nedda

I joined ATGWU because / Negatta ku kibiina kyabakozi olwensonga

KAMBE is an affiliated organisation of the union / Kambe yegatta ku Union

I share the same values and beliefs as the union / Nina endowooza ne bigendelerwa byebimu nga ekibiina kya bakozi

I want to access the services the union provides for its members / Nayagala okufuna emigasso egyiva mu kibiina kya bakozi

Other / Ensonga endala yonna

Using the Kambe app as a trade union member would enable me to: Okozessa omutimbagano gwa KAMBE nze nga ali mu kibiina kya bakozi kigya ku nyamba.

Keep my contact information up to date / Amawulire aganfakko okuba nga gamulembe buli kiseera

Pay my union membership dues regularly / okusobola okusasula sente za Union mu budde

Participate in my union by using the Chatroom to communicate and mobilise / Okwetaba mu nkola za Union yange nga nkozessa omutimbagano guno era kinyambe okunga ne banange

Other / ensonga endala yonna.

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RIDING ON A UNION APP

Uganda's Public Transport Workers' Digital Response to Platforms



The Uganda case study is an impressive example of an African trade union renewing itself in the face of a significantly changing transport sector through the entrance of multinational platform companies into an informal urban transport market. The multi-faceted strategy enabled AGTWU to increase its associational power, not only through a rise in membership but also an increase of its infrastructural resources, membership participation and internal cohesion.



In just over five years, Uganda's Amalgamated Transport and General Workers' Union (ATGWU) transformed itself from a trade union with about 5,000 members to one which represented one in every five workers in the Uganda's transport sector. Through affiliation of mass organisations of informal and precarious workers, the union has managed to sore its membership to 105,000 in 2019. The union has taken active steps to cross the divide between formal and informal workers and to make the union a home for both.



An innovation of ATGWU is the adoption of digital applications as tools to provide service to informal transport workers and to collect membership dues. Furthermore, the digital application intends to enable the associations affiliated to AGTWU to compete with public transport multinationals such as Uber and Taxify in Kampala, which are threatening the livelihoods of informal public transport operators. While the study also sheds light on challenges in this process, first successes, for instance at the Entebbe Airport, clearly demonstrate the potential of worker-owned digital applications in Africa and beyond.

For further information on this topic:
<https://www.fes.de/lnk/transform>