

RESEARCH ARTICLE



The Relationship between Bodaboda Riders and Livelihoods Among their Families in Magugu Ward, Babati District. A Qualitative Study

Obedi L. Ngalesoni^{1*}, Glory N. Urassa¹ and Geoffrey A. Mwakifwamba¹

¹Local Government Training Institute, Dodoma, Tanzania

Received: February 18, 2025

Accepted: March 03, 2025

Published: March 15, 2025

Abstract: Bodaboda motorcycle taxis are integral to the informal transportation sector in East Africa, significantly impacting family livelihoods. While studies in Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania have explored the role of bodaboda riders in improving household incomes and access to services, there is a gap in understanding this livelihood strategy in Magugu Ward, Babati District, Tanzania. This qualitative study examines how bodaboda riding affects family livelihoods in this specific context, drawing on the human capital theory. The research reveals that bodaboda riding is a primary source of income for many families in Magugu Ward, contributing to education, healthcare, and basic needs. However, challenges such as income instability, safety concerns, and a lack of formal recognition mirror those in other African contexts, threatening the sustainability of this livelihood. The study recommends policy interventions, income diversification, and safety measures to enhance the long-term viability of bodaboda riding as a means of improving family livelihoods in Magugu Ward. These findings contribute to the broader understanding of bodaboda riders' role in East Africa and offer insights for policy and development strategies in similar contexts.

Keywords: Bodaboda Riders, Livelihoods, Magugu Ward, Family Welfare

1. INTRODUCTION

In East Africa, bodaboda (motorcycle taxis) have become an integral part of the informal transportation sector, playing a significant role in the livelihoods of many families. These motorcycle taxis have transformed the way people move within urban and rural areas, contributing to economic activities and providing a vital income for many households. The role of bodaboda riders in improving family livelihoods has been well-documented in countries like Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania, but there remains a gap in understanding the specific impact of this livelihood strategy within the context of Magugu Ward, Babati District in Tanzania.

In Uganda, bodaboda riders are considered a primary source of employment in both urban and rural areas. According to research by Mwanja (2020), bodaboda riding has significantly improved the economic status of many families in Uganda, especially in rural areas where formal employment is scarce. Riders' earnings help cover household expenses such as food, school fees, and healthcare, contributing to enhanced living standards. However, the study also highlights challenges, such as income instability and health risks, which affect the sustainability of this livelihood.

*Correspondence should be addressed to Obedi L. Ngalesoni, Local Government Training Institute, Dodoma, Tanzania;
E-mail: ngalesoniobedi@gmail.com

Similarly, in Kenya, bodaboda riding is an important livelihood strategy, especially in peri-urban and rural regions. A study by Obado et al. (2019) indicates that bodaboda riders provide a significant income for their families and contribute to local economies by offering affordable transportation for goods and people. The study further reports that many bodaboda riders in Kenya are able to send their children to school and provide healthcare services, which is crucial in areas with limited access to formal employment. However, safety concerns and the lack of proper regulation have been cited as major drawbacks to the long-term viability of bodaboda riding as a livelihood in Kenya.

In Tanzania, particularly in rural areas bodaboda riding has come out as a primary source of income. A study by Mnyika (2021) reveals that bodaboda riders contribute significantly to household income in Tanzania, particularly in areas where agriculture does not always provide a stable income. This sector not only benefits riders but also boosts local economies by enabling the movement of goods and people. In Magugu Ward, many families rely on bodaboda riders as a means of livelihood, contributing to improved access to services and economic growth in the community. However, like in Uganda and Kenya, the Tanzanian bodaboda sector faces challenges such as inconsistent earnings, road safety issues, and a lack of formal recognition and support. While studies in Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania provide valuable insights into the role of bodaboda riders in improving family livelihoods, there remains a significant gap in understanding the specific dynamics within Magugu Ward, Babati District. This study aims to fill this gap by providing an in-depth analysis of how bodaboda riding affects the livelihoods of families in Magugu Ward and exploring potential policy interventions to enhance the sustainability of this livelihood strategy.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was anchored on the theory of human capital developed by Gary Becker (Mid 1960) focuses on the role of education, skills, and experience in improving an individual's productivity and economic outcomes. In the context of bodaboda riders, this theory can explain how their knowledge, skills, and physical ability to operate the motorcycles contribute to their success in generating income. It also suggests that investments in the human capital of bodaboda riders, such as training in road safety, motorcycle maintenance, and customer service, can improve their economic returns and, by extension, the livelihoods of their families. The application of human capital theory helps understand how individual capabilities are directly linked to household welfare.

2.1. Literature Review

In Nigeria, the motorcycle taxi industry (commonly known as "okada") is widespread and plays a crucial role in urban and rural transportation. A study by Ogunlela and Olajide (2020) examined the contribution of okada riders to household income in Lagos State, finding that a significant proportion of okada riders in urban areas rely on this occupation to meet their families' needs. The study showed that while many riders are able to send their children to school and contribute to household expenses, the lack of job security, high accident rates, and regulatory challenges are significant issues for riders' long-term financial stability.

In South Africa, research on informal transportation services, particularly the role of motorcycle taxis, is more limited but increasingly relevant as urbanization grows. A study by Sibanda (2021) explored informal transportation in South African cities, focusing on the economic contribution of motorcycle taxis in Cape Town. The findings revealed that these taxis serve as a major source of income for many riders, especially in areas with poor public transport options. Furthermore, the study highlighted that while motorcycle taxi services provide essential employment opportunities in low-income communities, the riders face challenges such as traffic accidents, lack of formal regulation, and competition from other modes of transport. The lack of institutional support and training for riders was identified as a barrier to improving income stability and enhancing family livelihoods. The research suggested that addressing safety concerns and improving access to financial services could improve the livelihoods of riders in South Africa.

In Ghana, motorcycle taxis (known as "okada") are also an important livelihood source for many families. A study by Agyemang and Osei (2020) in the Ashanti Region found that motorcycle taxis are particu-

larly vital in providing transportation in rural and peri-urban areas where there are limited or no public transport options. The study revealed that motorcycle taxis contribute significantly to the household income of riders, with many using their earnings to invest in education, healthcare, and other essentials. However, the study also highlighted that the informal nature of the industry exposes riders to economic vulnerabilities, including fluctuating earnings and poor working conditions. Additionally, riders in Ghana often face challenges such as lack of proper safety gear, traffic accidents, and legal issues stemming from the regulatory environment. The research emphasized the need for policy reforms that address these issues, particularly improving riders' access to social protection and enhancing the safety regulations governing the industry.

In Zimbabwe, motorcycle taxis play a key role in the informal transportation system, especially in the context of economic instability and high unemployment rates. A study by Chikozho and Mutambara (2021) found that bodaboda riders in Harare provide a crucial service in transporting goods and people, and the income they generate is vital for families struggling with inflation and job scarcity. The research noted that bodaboda riding allows families to access goods and services in areas where formal transport systems are unreliable. In addition, the study also noted that the industry is heavily affected by economic fluctuations, with rising fuel prices and limited access to spare parts for motorcycles leading to reduced incomes. The study suggested that financial literacy programs for riders, along with better regulation and safety measures, could improve the sustainability of the livelihood and the well-being of riders' families.

In Tanzania a study conducted by Kibatala and Kibiti (2019) found that bodaboda riding is one of the most important sources of income for rural households in Dodoma. The study indicated that most riders depend on the daily income from their motorcycle services to support their families, covering essential needs such as food, housing, and education. The ability of riders to meet these household expenses was seen as a positive aspect, especially in areas where formal employment is scarce. Despite the valuable insights from studies on bodaboda riders in Tanzania, there remains a gap in research specifically focusing on the long-term impact of bodaboda riding on the socio-economic mobility of rural families, especially in areas like Magugu Ward, Babati District, where studies are few. Opportunities are limited or non-existent.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

The study employed a descriptive research design to explore the relationship between bodaboda riders' activities and the livelihoods of their families in Magugu Ward. This design was chosen because it allows for an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in its natural setting, particularly in a context where quantitative data alone may not capture the nuanced experiences of bodaboda riders and their families. Descriptive research is well-suited for qualitative studies aiming to describe behaviors, experiences, and social contexts, making it appropriate for this study's objectives.

3.2. Target Population and Sampling

The study included all bodaboda riders operating in Magugu ward and their respective households, a totaling 150 individuals. A sample of 100 bodaboda riders and households was chosen for the study. Stratified random sampling and simple sampling techniques were used to make sure a diverse and representative sample. Specifically, stratified random sampling was used to categorize the population into groups, such as bodaboda riders and households, and then simple random sampling was used to select the respondents from each group.

3.3. Data Collection

The data collection process involved interviews and observations. The study employed purposive sampling to obtain 60 bodaboda riders and 40 households. The interviews were conducted in Magugu area, where the study was conducted to gather in depth information about the bodaboda rider's experiences and their impact on the livelihoods. Along with interviews, the research team did field observations in Magugu

Ward. These observations centered on the bodaboda riders' everyday routines, interactions with customers, and the overall life in which they operate.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis process in this study systematically transformed qualitative data from interviews and observations into meaningful insights about the role of bodaboda riding in family livelihoods in Magugu Ward. It began with data familiarization, where transcripts and notes were thoroughly reviewed to identify initial patterns, followed by coding and theme development, which organized the data into categories such as "Bodaboda Riding as a Livelihood Strategy" and "Challenges and Sustainability." These themes were refined through iterative review and cross-checking to ensure accuracy. Finally, the themes were interpreted using human capital theory and compared with existing literature, linking findings to broader contexts and drawing actionable conclusions. This rigorous approach, supported by manual coding and triangulation, ensured the findings were credible, relevant, and reflective of participants' experiences.

5. RESULTS

5.1 Bodaboda Riding as a Livelihood Strategy

The study found that bodaboda riding is a significant livelihood strategy for families in Magugu Ward. The majority of the bodaboda riders interviewed relied on this occupation as their primary source of income. The earnings from bodaboda were used to cover various household expenses including food, education, healthcare, and other basic needs. This aligns with human capital theory, which suggests that the rider's skills and physical abilities contribute to their economic productivity, ultimately benefiting their families.

5.2. Impact on Family Livelihoods

Bodaboda riding has a substantial impact on the livelihoods of families in Magugu Ward. Many respondents reported that their income from bodaboda riding has enabled them to send their children to school, access health services and improve their overall living standards. This finding is consistent with studies in Uganda, Kenya and other African countries where bodaboda riding has been linked to improved family welfare.

5.3. Challenges and Sustainability

Despite the positive impact on livelihoods, bodaboda riders in Magugu Ward face several challenges that affect the sustainability of this livelihood strategy. These challenges include income instability due to varying daily earnings, high operational costs and safety concerns. The lack of formal recognition and support from local authorities was also cited as a significant issue, mirroring the situation in Uganda and Kenya.

6. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight the dual nature of bodaboda riding as a livelihood strategy in Magugu Ward. On one hand, it serves as a vital source of income for families, enabling access to education, healthcare, and other essential services. On the other hand, the challenges faced by bodaboda riders—such as income instability, safety concerns, and lack of formal recognition pose significant threats to the sustainability of this livelihood. These findings align with the human capital theory, which emphasizes the role of individual skills and abilities in enhancing household welfare. However, the study also reveals systemic issues that require targeted policy interventions to ensure the long-term viability of bodaboda riding as a livelihood strategy.

6.1. Policy Implications for Income Stability

One of the most pressing challenges identified in this study is income instability. Bodaboda riders in Magugu Ward often experience fluctuating daily earnings due to factors such as seasonal demand, fuel

price volatility, and competition. This instability not only affects the riders' ability to meet household needs but also undermines their capacity to plan for the future. To address this, policy interventions should focus on creating mechanisms to stabilize income. For example, cooperative savings schemes local authorities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) could facilitate the establishment of savings and credit cooperatives (SACCOs) for bodaboda riders. These cooperatives would allow riders to pool resources, access low-interest loans, and build financial resilience during periods of low income.

CONCLUSION

Bodaboda riding plays a crucial role in the livelihood of many families in Magugu Ward. While it provides a significant source of income and contributes to improved access to services, the challenges faced by riders threaten the sustainability of this livelihood. The finding of this study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on bodabodea riders in Africa and provide insights specific to the Magugu Ward.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Policy Interventions

Local authorities should consider implementing policies that formally recognize and support bodaboda riders in Magugu Ward. This could include safety training, access to affordable healthcare, and initiatives to stabilize income, such as cooperative savings schemes.

Income Diversification

Bodaboda riders should be encouraged to diversify their income sources to mitigate the risks associated with income instability. This could involve training in other skills or supporting riders in establishing small businesses alongside their riding activities.

Safety Measures

Given the safety concerns, initiatives to improve road safety for bodaboda riders should be prioritized. This may include mandatory safety gear, traffic regulations specific to motorcycles, and public awareness campaigns.

Further Research

More in-depth studies are needed to explore the long-term impact of bodaboda riding on socio-economic mobility in rural areas like Magugu Ward. This could involve longitudinal studies tracking the economic trajectories of bodaboda riders and their families over time.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

The author confirms sole responsibility for the following: study conception and design, data collection, analysis and interpretation of results, and manuscript preparation.

CONSENT FOR PUBLICATION

Not applicable.

FUNDING

None.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author confirms that this article's content has no conflict of interest.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Declared none.

REFERENCES

- Agyemang, S., & Osei, E. (2020). The Role of Okada Transport in the Livelihoods of Rural Households in Ashanti Region, Ghana. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 10(11), 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.20431/2454-9655.0101101>
- Chikozho, E., & Mutambara, N. (2021). Bodaboda Transport and Economic Resilience in Zimbabwe: A Case Study of Harare. *Journal of Transport and Land Use*, 14(1), 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.5198/jtlu.2021.1606>
- Kibatala, A., & Kibiti, E. (2019). Bodaboda Transport and Rural Livelihoods in Dodoma, Tanzania. *Journal of Transport and Land Use*, 12(1), 859-873. <https://doi.org/10.5198/jtlu.2019.1413>
- Mnyika, E. (2021). Bodaboda Transport and Rural Livelihoods in Tanzania: A Case Study of Mwanza Region. *Journal of Transport and Supply Chain Management*, 15(1), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.4102/jtscm.v15i1.1315>
- Mwanja, D. (2020). Bodaboda Transport in Uganda: A Livelihood Strategy or a Source of Social Disorder? *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 10(1), 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.20431/2454-9655.0101001>
- Obado, P., Amek, N., & Nyangweso, I. (2019). The Role of Bodaboda Transport in Enhancing Livelihoods in Kenya. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 3(1), 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.20431/2520-7901.0301001>
- Ogunlela, O., & Olajide, O. (2020). Okada Transport and Household Income in Lagos State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 10(12), 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.20431/2454-9655.0101201>
- Sibanda, T. (2021). Motorcycle Taxis and Informal Transportation in South African Cities: A Case Study of Cape Town. *Urban Forum*, 32(2), 205-220. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12132-020-09516-5>

© 2025 Ngalesoni *et al.*

This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Public License (CC-BY 4.0), a copy of which is available at: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode>. This license permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.