

Tanzania

Towards the Just City in Africa

*Urban Life and the
Informal Transport in
Dar es Salaam*

Imprint

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Content

Background	3
Why and how is urban growth in transport sector in Dar es Salaam currently producing (more) injustices in motorcycle-taxis sector, and for whom?	5
What are the political realities our partners in the sector face?	5
What needs to change?	5
1. Conflict and Challenges	5
2. Anchoring the principles of just city	6
The approach to just transport	6
Putting the just city principles put into practice in transport sector in Dar es Salaam?	7
How is the motorcycle-taxis sector in Dar es Salaam becoming more just?	7
Steps towards more just urban transport in Dar es Salaam	8
How to incentivize innovation?	10

Background

Across Africa, the registered number of motorcycles has risen from an estimated 5 million in 2010 to 27 million in 2022, of which 80 percent are used as taxis or for deliveries (Bishop and Courtright 2022, 5). In Tanzania, two- and three-wheeler motorcycle-taxis—popularly known as *boda boda* and *bajaj*—started appearing only two decades ago. Yet as of 2020, there were an estimated 1,493,250 motorcycles operating countrywide (Bishop and Courtright 2022, 108). Although estimates for Dar es Salaam vary, association leaders and local authority officials suggest there are over 200,000 motorcycle-taxis operating across the city (Key Informant Interviews, 20 November 2023).

Amidst rapid urbanization, the supply of motorcycle-taxi drivers—and the demand for transport—will increase, likely irrespective of public transport projects like Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) (Chiu 2022; World Population Review 2024). There is also substantial new capital investment in motorcycles, be it in importation, assembly, finance, or various motorcycle-related businesses, notably new fintech ventures (Collord 2024a; Pollio, Cirolia, and Ong’iro Odeo 2023). In 2022, Tanza-

nia’s motorcycle market reached US\$260 million, and annual growth is projected at four percent in coming years (TechSci 2023).

As the motorcycle-taxi sector grows, inequalities within it are also becoming more apparent, and require attention. There is the challenge of unequally distributed incomes between formal, larger-scale investors in the sector and drivers, operating largely informally (Diaz Olvera, Plat, and Pochet 2020; Collord 2024a). There are also inequalities among drivers themselves. Differences persist, for instance, between association leaders and ordinary drivers as well as between a majority male workforce and the small but growing number of women operating alongside (Mukwaya et al. 2022). Apart from the general challenges mentioned above, there are specific challenges confronting women drivers. They face various forms of discrimination, which often turn into gender-based and sexual violence.

In a nutshell, the political economy of Dar es Salaam’s motorcycle-taxi sector is characterised by a mix of informalization and labor precarity, gen-

der-based and sexual violence, safety concerns, lack of coherent regulatory frameworks, women underrepresentation (including social stigma), and rapid urban growth. While the sector is rapidly growing and plays a crucial role in providing affordable transportation and employment, a question on how can the motorcycle-taxi drivers be part of a just city vision is still pertinent.

On the side of daladalas which also contribute to the significant portion of transport in Dar es Salaam the prevalent problems or main criticism are poor safety standards, overcrowding, inconsistency in service provision, affordability and contribution to traffic congestions in the city – which leads to increased travel time and higher transportation costs. Apparently, enforcement of safety standards such as vehicle inspections, seatbelts etc has always been lax.

On the other hand, a political focus on ensuring that daladala transport is affordable to urban poor is always encountered by the challenge of balancing affordability with the need to ensure the financial sustainability of daladalas operators and maintain quality services.

Therefore, the political reality of Daladala in Dar es Salaam is a mixture of informality, economic necessity

and political influence.

Addressing the above-mentioned realities, several coordinated actions must be undertaken by multiple stakeholders, including the government, motorcycle-taxi associations, drivers, private sector actors, and civil society organizations.

The FES Tanzania in collaboration with COTWU-T have jointly organized various initiatives to mobilise workers in the formal economy (motorcycle-taxi drivers) in a drive to ensure that their voices, perspectives and experiences are incorporated in urban planning and implementation.

1. Conflict and Challenges

Why and how is urban growth in transport sector in Dar es Salaam currently producing (more) injustices in motorcycle-taxis sector, and for whom?

Despite the fact that the urban growth in Dar es Salaam transport sector has managed to provide economic opportunities, it has also produced significant injustices particularly for motorcycle-taxi driver as well as marginalized groups such as women.

Due to the informal nature of the sector, there are safety concerns for passengers and drivers, unsafe working conditions, gender inequality and lack of labor rights. No written contracts, low wages that doesn't reflect the working hours, women working as drivers are underrepresented, women passengers feel unsafe when using the bodaboda due to harassment etc.

What are the political realities our partners in the sector face?

Despite the government efforts to formally regulate the motorcycle-taxi

transport sector, operationally it is kind of a self-regulating sector (informality, gender inequality, safety concerns etc), there is poor coordination and organizational fragmentation within the sector. It suffices to declare that all the efforts by the Government to formally regulate the sector were or are not driven by the quest to see the sector thrive but rather gaining political mileage – bodaboda drivers is an important group to win over.

What needs to change?

The sector is characterized by labor precarity, gender-based and sexual violence, safety concerns, lack of coherent regulatory frameworks and women underrepresentation (including social stigma). Addressing the above-mentioned realities, requires an integrated approach that involves the government (local and central), motorcycle-taxi associations, drivers and civil society organizations - more importantly, the good political will from the Government's side is crucial!

2. Anchoring the principles of just city

The approach to just transport

The joint efforts between FES Tanzania and Communication and Transport Workers Union of Tanzania (COTWU-T) were geared towards ensuring that motorcycle-taxi drivers are part of a just city vision. Their voices, perspectives and experiences are incorporated in urban planning and implementation strategies.

On the other hand, it was also the aspiration of FES and COTWU (T) to contribute in ensuring that the motorcycle-taxi drivers are respected, valued and treated fairly given the important role they play in urban mobility.

In a drive to achieve the above-mentioned goals, COTWU (T) was deliberately capacitated with strategies on recruiting and organizing the informal sector workers to fight for their rights. A series of local and international strategic capacity building workshops were conducted for that course which were then followed up by COTWU (T) continuous engagements with informal sector workers.

In addition to that, FES can play a critical role by fostering dialogues and strategic empowering the bodaboda sector players to advocate for inclusive policies. FES can also make use of its long history of working with the trade unions to promote workers right. In collaboration with COTWU (T), FES can support the advocacy for better working condition for informal transport operators including labor right protection and social security benefits.

As opposed to previous practises, the municipals (Ilala City Council and Kinondoni Municipal) are currently involving the drivers in the planning of new parking areas. The presence of organized motorcycle-taxi drivers has kind of necessitated the municipalities, to involve the drivers in the planning of new parking areas, notably in the CBD where there were previously very few parking areas. In contrast to some past planning attempts, there is now wider recognition of the need to register parking areas 'where there are people'. In the past, the parking areas were decided by authorities without consultations with drivers.

Putting the just city principles put into practice in transport sector in Dar es Salaam?

In the quest to map and formalise the parking areas for motorcycle-taxis drivers in CBD, the municipals consulted and engaged a wide range of stakeholders. The meetings included the chairpersons of individual parking areas as well as street chairpersons, street and ward executive officers, municipal business officers, and police. The mapping and formalisation process were grounded in the idea that the motorcycle drivers have a stake and the right to participate in the decision making regarding the parking areas – the drivers had a say in where the parking areas should be placed. This is a clear manifestation of **inclusion and participation** in decision making.

On the other hand, the operators (drivers) are respected and the sector in general is now valued as a source of livelihoods and as a convenient form of transport as opposed to the previous notion. The respectful nature, fair interactions among bodaboda drivers and passengers and the recognition of the sector's worth regardless of the informal nature of the service symbolises **dignity** – it implies respect for and recognizing others (in-

formal economy actors) as equal citizens.

Lastly, there are ongoing efforts of improving security and safety for both passengers and drivers in the motorcycle-taxis transport sector.

Despite the above-mentioned milestones, yet it is premature to declare that the public transport in Dar es Salaam is just. Making it more just is an ongoing process that requires continuous efforts to address complex and evolving issues such as fairness, regulations, affordability, safety, gender inequality, social protection etc.

How is the motorcycle-taxis sector in Dar es Salaam becoming more just?

There are increased efforts to formalize the sector and make it more professional in-service delivery and registering packing spaces to avoid evictions by municipal authorities. Improving women participation in the sector is another aspect which showcases how the sector is gradually evolving and becoming more just. Lastly, there is a growing trend in which the players in the motorcycle-taxis transport sector have been involved in consultations with the authorities whenever there are concerns over their welfares.

Steps towards more just urban transport in Dar es Salaam

Which action – and by whom – is needed to permanently bring about a just city in motorcycle-taxis transport sector in Dar es Salaam?

In order to permanently bring justice in motorcycle-taxi transport in Dar es Salaam, there is an urgent need to improve regulations, ensure driver's representation, fair wages and economic justice, safety, and political engagement of all players in the transport sector. This can be done through:

- **Conduct Research:** In recognition of the fact that researched information is essential for making informed decisions, FES in collaboration with COTWU (T) have conducted a research on the motorcycle-taxi transport sector in Dar es Salaam in a drive to understand the dynamics and complexities of the sector and how it can be managed sustainably and equitably in order to make the sector part of the just city vision. The findings will be disseminated to relevant stakeholders for further actions to contribute to socially just public transport.
- **Advocate for fair wages and economic justice:** Many motorcycle-taxi drivers in urban areas particularly in Dar es Salaam face exploitative pay structures especially those who work on contractual basis, therefore establishing fair compensation practises is crucial for economic justice. The FES in collaboration with COTWU (T) can support the creation of workers union or cooperatives for bodaboda drivers where they can advocate for better wages, benefits and good working conditions. However, this is a daunting challenge considering the fragmented nature of the sector where drivers work under informal/non-unionized arrangement.
- **Institutional co-ordination and local government agency:** While various state actors have led on promising reform initiatives, there is a need for improved intra-governmental coordination on the issue of motorcycle-transport at all levels. Within Dar es Salaam, there is then a need for better city-wide coordination. Ilala Municipality currently doubles as the Dar es Salaam City Council since the latter was disbanded in 2021, but it does not appear to be serving a coordination function, at least as regards regulation of the motorcycle-taxi sector. It is reported that the Government is underway to reinstate the former

structure of the city authority with one apex body (Dar es Salaam City Council) overseeing the rest of the municipals, this could be helpful to improve the coordination.

→ **Support for women drivers:** A growing number of women are entering the motorcycle-taxi sector and require targeted support, along with other women operating in the informal economy. Priorities include support for women's organisation—either within existing associations or through their own, all-women groups—and measures to tackle the urgent issue of gender-based violence. More generally, it is important to develop tailored policy and legislation to protect the rights of informal economy workers, with specific provisions for motorcycle-taxi drivers and for women. FES and other stakeholders stand a better chance to raise awareness and challenge stereotypes and prejudices that women shouldn't work in certain sectors particularly those seen as male-dominated.

→ **Regulation of asset-financing and platform companies:** Private sector actors entering the motorcycle-taxi sector can have both a positive impact and a potentially negative one. Where they contribute to sustainability, e.g. by promoting electrification, these efforts can be

encouraged with supportive policies. However, greater attention should be paid to private sector activities that contribute to rapid growth in motorcycle-taxis but without clear social benefits. Regulatory efforts frequently target motorcycle-taxi drivers but could also consider the contribution of actors higher up the value chain, for instance, through stronger regulation of asset-finance and platform companies, the interest rates and commissions that they are allowed to charge, and any potential misinformation of drivers.

→ **Assembling a reform coalition:** Among state actors, civil society, and donors, there are various actors committed to more participatory transport planning. Land Transport Regulatory Authority (LATRA) and many Local Government Authorities (LGAs) have elements of a participatory vision, regardless of certain challenges. In addition to that, various NGOs and advocacy organisations focus on road safety issues as well as supporting livelihoods in the informal economy, including with an emphasis on women can be brought on board. These actors could convene, alongside representatives from a range of drivers' groups, to build a shared vision and strategy for championing a just motorcycle-taxi sector in Dar es Salaam.

The FES role in this regard is to strategically build the capacity of its partners who are potential participants of these consultation meetings in order to meaningfully engage and make positive impacts.

How to incentivize innovation?

The research which was conducted has provided the evidence, insights, action points and relevant stakeholders who are essential in a drive to make the motorcycle-taxi transport sector part of the just city vision. This serves as the foundation or guidance for innovative solutions.

Towards the Just City in Africa: Urban Life and the Informal Transport in Dar es Salaam

The Just City Project showcases compelling stories of urban transformation across African cities, illustrating how communities, local governments, and civil society are working together to build more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable urban spaces. Through case studies from Zimbabwe, Cameroon, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia, the project captures diverse urban realities and innovative responses emerging from rapidly changing city contexts.

Each case study follows a clear journey from challenge to change, examining the forces shaping each city, the key urban issues and affected communities, and the strategies used to address them. By highlighting outcomes, lessons learned, and links to wider regional and global agendas, the collection offers practical insights and inspiration for advancing just urban development across Africa and beyond.

Further information on this topic can be found here:

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