

Opportunities to maximise the benefits of motorcycle and three-wheeler taxis in rural Africa

Key policy implications

- Banning motorcycle and three-wheeler taxis does not prevent their use in rural areas, due to lack of enforcement. Rather, it may reduce the benefits they can provide and increase the associated risks.
- In countries where the use of motorcycles and/or three-wheelers as taxis is currently illegal, governments should consider developing effective legal mechanisms to allow their use on rural roads.
- Relevant government departments should work together to manage the motorcycle and three-wheeler taxi sector, aiming to develop professional riders who are well-trained, licensed, registered, insured and conscious of passengers' needs.
- Improved opportunities for high standard training should be made available to riders in rural areas. Innovative ways of funding this should be explored, for example through local government bursaries – recognising that riders are unlikely to be able to cover the full costs.
- Countries should adopt a standardised [training curriculum](#), supported by an instructor's manual. Those developed for Tanzania could be adapted to fit other country contexts.
- A clear distinction needs to be made between 'training' and 'sensitisation'. Licences should only be issued to riders who have completed training and have passed an adequate theoretical and practical test.
- Riders should be required to belong to registered motorcycle and three-wheeler taxi associations. Associations should be supported and overseen by local government, promoting use of an operating manual similar to that developed for Tanzania. Associations should support riders to access training, and encourage them to use personal protective equipment.
- Rural roads should be designed and maintained with consideration for the safety of motorcycles and motorised three-wheelers.
- Studies should be carried out to investigate the potential to increase the benefits of motorcycle and three-wheeler usage in urban areas of Sub-Saharan Africa, and to reduce the burden of safety risks.

Background

Motorcycle taxis play a critical role in rural transport in Africa. In many countries, they are the only available and affordable means of motorised transport for people living in rural communities.

They connect farmers to markets and people to goods and services. They provide access to healthcare, including in medical emergencies. They generate employment and income, and they are a popular mode of transport for rural people.

Despite this, in some African countries, the use of motorcycles as taxis is illegal. In such countries, legislation has often been developed in response to road safety concerns that are primarily based on high rates of injuries in urban areas.

Policy makers are understandably more familiar with urban contexts. In the major cities of many African countries, there are serious road safety issues surrounding motorcycle and three-wheeler taxis, as well as issues related to crime and anti-social behaviour. However, applying a solution – such as an overall ban – to an urban problem, without fully understanding the impact in rural areas, has the potential to negatively impact millions of people who live in rural Africa.

Even in countries where the use of motorcycles as taxis is legal, the operating environment is often far from ideal. If not effectively managed, profits for riders are limited, and motorcycle taxis pose risk of injury and health issues. Some people in rural communities are unable to – or choose not to – use motorcycle taxis due to physical constraints or safety concerns.

In some countries, three-wheeler taxis operate in rural areas, but in general their numbers are far lower than motorcycles.

This policy brief has been developed based on a 2018 study of motorcycle and three-wheeler taxis in rural areas of Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. The aim of the study was to improve knowledge and understanding concerning effective ways of enabling rural people to benefit from the safe use of motorcycles and three-wheelers. The objective was to enable the safe operation of these vehicles to provide good, affordable and inclusive access for rural communities.

Research methodology

Following a [literature review](#) and stakeholder engagement exercise aimed at understanding the existing situation surrounding motorcycles and three-wheeler taxis in rural areas, a set of research activities was developed.

Reviews of the regulatory frameworks and enforcement methods, and of the current status of training, were carried out in all four countries. Furthermore, in each of the four countries, a comprehensive survey of riders, owners and users was carried out in eight rural settlements, covering topics including finance, accessibility, injuries and crime. An investigation into the potential of technology to improve motorcycle and three-wheeler taxi services was carried out in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, as well as in Rwanda.

In each of the four main project countries, at least one country-specific activity was undertaken, addressing an area of interest identified through the assessment of the existing situation. In Ghana, this looked at existing data; in Kenya, the focus was on health; in Tanzania, two manuals were developed; and in Uganda, issues facing those members of the community who do not use motorcycle taxis were investigated.

The findings of the research were discussed with policy-makers and other stakeholders from the four project countries, allowing comparisons to be drawn and ideas to be shared. Their input contributed greatly to the development of this policy brief.



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Key findings

The use of both motorcycles and three-wheelers as taxis is illegal in Ghana but legal in Kenya and Tanzania. In Uganda, the use of motorcycles as taxis is legal but the use of three-wheelers as taxis is illegal.

The survey found that in comparison to the other three countries, Ghana had the highest proportion of motorcycle taxi riders who:

- Had been injured in the last month
- Had suffered two or more injuries ever
- Described their worst injury as 'severe'
- Missed over 30 days of normal activity as a result of their worst injury; and
- Had never received any formal motorcycle training

While it is difficult to directly link these findings to the fact that the use of motorcycle taxis is illegal in Ghana, the negative indicators attributed to Ghana from the research may suggest a connection.

However, while Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda showed somehow more positive results, little of what was observed in these countries could be described as 'best practice'. For example, the country with the highest proportion of motorcycle taxi riders who had ever undergone formal training was Tanzania, at just 34%. In Kenya and Uganda, the figures were 20% and 8% respectively.

In all countries, concerted efforts are needed to manage, regulate and professionalise the motorcycle and three-wheeler taxi sector. In order for efforts to be effective, relevant government departments need to work together and to engage other stakeholders.

The provision of training, testing and licensing needs to be significantly improved. Motorcycle and three-wheeler taxi associations have the potential to assist riders to access training, and to influence other areas of their operations. Associations should be supported by local government.

"This research will help us to formulate policy to improve transport for rural people."

Nat Dzedzey, Akatsi South District Assembly,
Ghana

Manuals for motorcycles

As part of this project, two manuals have been developed in Tanzania:

- ▶ A motorcycle training [instructor's manual](#)
- ▶ A motorcycle taxi associations' [operating manual](#)

These have the potential to be adapted for use in other countries.