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Electric Moto-Taxis Innovation in Low Income Countries: A Rider's Perspective in Kampala

Monday morning in Kampala promised a busy day as school started after a long lockdown from the COVID-19 pandemic. Every family was preparing to send their children to school, and the traffic jams in Uganda's capital would be monstrous. Sammy Kalunji, working as a boda rider (motorcycle taxi operator) for the last 10 years, was getting ready to start his day. He was operating from Matugga, a small peripheral town near Kampala, where he lived with his wife and four children.

Kalunji previously worked as a street vendor. An attack by thieves who stole his merchandise led him to start working as a boda operator by leasing a motorcycle from a friend. Later, he acquired a loan to purchase his own P-boda (or Petrol-boda). He operated the motorcycle for eight years until 2019, when he switched to an electric boda (or E-boda), with lower operating costs, in a bid to gain an advantage over other boda riders.

Since his decision to sell his petrol motorcycle and acquire an electric one, Kalunji was confronted with multiple urgent and related dilemmas he had to negotiate creatively and innovatively to harness opportunities and survive as a low-income self-employed transport entrepreneur in Kampala. He had to think about how to overcome the pandemic collapse of his business and retrieve the path of a decent livelihood both in the short run and over the long term. Amid technological, economic, and social disruptions, Kalunji represented a test case for efficiently harnessing the opportunities presented by a new low-carbon urban transportation solution and contributing to the transition to green urban mobility in Kampala.

The question for individuals such as Sammy Kalunji was how to make a good living amid the transition.

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