

COVID-19 IMPACTS ON WOMEN TRANSPORT USERS AND TRANSPORT WORKERS IN AFRICA

INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 crisis has had a severe impact on Africa's poor. Transport, at the heart of the crisis, has presented massive challenges both for people using it and those working in the sector. This case study, built from research with women in three African cities (Abuja, Cape Town and Tunis), identifies key actions to support more female-friendly transport operations post-pandemic. Contributions of young women community peer researchers, reporting from low-income neighbourhoods in each city, are central to these findings.

WOMEN, TRANSPORT AND MOBILITY: THE AFRICAN CONTEXT

- Prevailing cultures of male auto mobility - constrain women's potential both as transport users and in transport sector employment
- Fear- and time-based exclusions significantly reduce women's access to transport (as users and workers) – far-reaching impacts on well-being

Women users:

- Few have access to private modes of transport; few cycle [practical constraints, social stigma]
- Trip chaining commonly required to manage work + domestic/caring duties
- Complex journeys, often lengthy, uncomfortable, costly, potentially dangerous
- Pushing, stealing and verbal/sexual harassment widespread on public transport

Women workers:

- Mostly low paid, low skilled, insecure work eg ticket selling
- Face stigma and sexual harassment on a daily basis – often a 'last resort' job

PEER RESEARCHERS: PANDEMIC MOBILITY INVESTIGATORS

- 18 unemployed young women recruited and trained in mobilities research pre-pandemic; became a crucial window into low income neighbourhoods during the pandemic
- Charted daily pandemic experiences/reflections through personal [im]mobility diaries and local media/social media reportage [archived on our website]
- The work provided a small income and, for some, a vital therapeutic space

<https://transportandyoutheemploymentinfrica.com>

WOMEN TRANSPORT WORKER EXPERIENCES IN THE PANDEMIC

- **Pandemic-induced formal and informal sector job losses**
- **Pandemic-induced emotional stress of women in customer-facing and cleaning roles**
- **If 'essential worker' status, stress of balancing income with infection risk**
- **Some new opportunities e.g. Cape Town e-hailing township taxi service targeting women.**

[I set up during the pandemic because] there is a gap in transport of providing safe transport for women... [we are] mainly focusing on females in township due to increase of vulnerability of females... [Cape Town woman, 19y]

WOMEN TRANSPORT USER EXPERIENCES IN THE PANDEMIC

- **Price hikes due to regulations such as reduced vehicle capacity and sanitisers, [e.g. Abuja women reported early increases of 50% on buses, over 100% on some taxis]**
- **Increased travel on foot due to higher fares, reduced services, fear of contracting Covid**
- **Increased insecurity and criminality plus police/military violence during lockdowns/curfews**
- **Heavily policed state regimes of control [to limit infection] operate alongside informal transport notoriously resistant to state control**
- **Stress experienced in lockdowns when must still travel/travel further to find essential income, food, water, healthcare, care work. Self-isolation is a privilege for the rich [jobs allowing home working require good internet access]**
- **Sexual harassment opportunities decline with reduced vehicle capacity [but visual harassment continues; GBV at home increases]**
- **Ethics as a reflexive and relational space – tensions inevitably spill over on the street, on transport, in the home; particular concern not to endanger vulnerable elders**
- **More selectivity in transport mode when funds allow [prefer taxis, not crowded buses]**
- **Selective strategies of engagement when negotiating externally imposed rules and contingencies [e.g. taxi drivers/fellow passengers without masks (reported as more common among men)]**

I came to the road side and met an empty keke [tricycle-taxi] ... He said its N100, I then told him that I would pay for the 3 seats [N300] and so he took me alone [Abuja woman, 35y]

REMAKING A TRANSPORT ENVIRONMENT, POST-COVID, MORE SENSITIVE TO WOMEN'S NEEDS

- Importance of increased visibility of women workers for security perceptions of women transport users and as role models
- Women workers need skills training, child care provision, flexible working and support for entrepreneurship e.g. microfinance and financial management training. Strong evidence of demand in all three cities
- Reductions in vehicle crowding essential to reduce sexual harassment – apps are helpful but insufficient
- Pressure for more emphasis on pedestrian and cycling safety – with low carbon benefits e.g. women's cycling groups [as in Tunis and Cape Town townships, but seemingly limited take up]
- Crucial importance of stronger representation of women in transport decision-making institutions

