

Economic Growth and Diversification: Public Transport Drivers' Perception of Their Inclusion in the Mainstream Employment. Case of Gaborone

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Abstract

This paper sought to establish the level of ambition that exists in local public transport drivers to participate in the mainstream line of economic growth and diversification. The study took a quantitative approach. During the study 100 respondents were randomly chosen. The chosen respondents were found at Gaborone taxi ranks. The taxi routes included in the study were made up of (Gabane, Tlokweg, Broadhurst, Mogoditshane, Ledumang, blocks, Mmopane, Naledi etc.) The evidence suggests that the majority of drivers in the local public transport industry have interest in being absorbed into the more sustainable formal sector. The paper established that the majority of people (67%) employed as public drivers have formal education and some have tertiary qualifications; and if opportunity presents itself they would like to be in other economic parts. It is important to note that those with tertiary qualification are involved in this sector because of estimated 37.5% youth unemployment rate. The remaining 33 % were content remaining in the Industry because of flexible working hours that enables them to do other side businesses. This study is a call to government to intervene in order to consider formalising this sector as a profession. In conclusion; Government and public transport sector should also consider coming up with a medium-term (five years) public transport plan and strategy to promote growth and sustainability of the sector since significant number of the drivers are serving in the industry not out of choice but because they could not obtain employment in their preferred trades. The paper recommends that Government should facilitate the formation of clusters for combi business in order to help the public transport industry to grow and ensure sustainability and hence eliminate the need to migrate to the mainstream sector

Keywords: Public Sector Transport, Inclusion, drivers, COVID-19, lockdown

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1.0 Introduction

Public transport is a good way to reduce congestion, environment and health-harming emissions in urban areas, especially when they run on alternative, cleaner fuels. In Europe, European commission strongly encourages the use of public transport as part of the mix of which each person living or working in a city can use (European Commission, 2020). It is an industry that developed countries are seriously nurturing to protect the environment, mitigate on road congestion and make savings on household unit driving costs. It is however apparent that in developing countries the development of public transport industry is not a priority from the central government point of view in terms of support and nurturing though the industry appears to making contribution to employment and economic diversification.

In purview of the above thoughts, this paper sought to establish the level of ambition that exists in local public transport drivers to participate in the mainstream line of economic growth and diversification. Anyaehie and Areji (2015) and Sanusi (2010) explain Economic diversification as a process of broadening the range of economic activities both in the production and distribution of goods and services. In the construct of this paper, the concept of economic diversification was viewed from the perspective of sustainable development to ensure long-term stability of the economy which is evident in the meeting of citizens' basic requirement which revolves around provision of job, food, health, clothing and shelter by opening diverse avenues of economic activity which accommodates broad spectrum of people. The research acknowledges local public transport driving as a form of economic activity. The research however sought to establish the local public drivers' level of aspiration to participate in economic diversification while engaged in mainstream private and public industries.

1.2 Study Background

The public transport in urban areas in Botswana mainly constitutes taxis and mini-buses, popularly known as combis among the locals (Rao, Vokolkova, n.d.). They transport passengers along designated routes for specified fares. Taxis are classified as special and ordinary with special ones essentially providing a single ride or door-to-door service, and the ordinary taxis are the ones with a standard fixed fare. IOA (2013) argues that "against the background of the present situation in the taxi industry, it is no doubt in the interest of all parties concerned (government, operators, drivers, commuters and the general public) that the formalisation of the industry be viewed afresh." Ordinary taxis, normally do not ply on any specific routes but they wait until the vehicle is filled up to

requisite capacity before departure to a common destination of the passengers. This service has proved to be both flexible and cost effective. In Botswana there have been few examples of success in this industry. People like Seabelo and A&T Monnakgotla are examples of successful stories in this industry. They started from owning one combi to owning fleet of combis and buses that employ hundreds of Batswana. This contributes to growth of economy in government revenue and curbing of unemployment rate. Long-distance passenger operations occur mainly between main urban and mining centres and major rural villages. Buses (and not minibuses) are used specially for these operations. In Botswana taxi/combi fares and operating permit are regulated by Ministry of Transport and Communications.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

While the local public transport industry is recognised as an area of employment, its sustainability has never ceased to be questionable as most of the business owners are sole traders who often die or get bankrupt with their ventures. Sustainability of such forms of business ownership in Botswana has a lower rating than established public and private companies in the same line of business. Many researches have been conducted in line with public transport Industry growth and economic sustainability in both developed and developing countries, however little is known about the perception of public transport drivers in small to medium enterprise. of their inclusion in the main stream in Botswana. This research study aims at establishing the perception of Public Transport drivers towards their nature of their job, job security, economic sustainability of their sector and inclusion in the main stream. As it can be seen by COVID 19 national lockdown in Botswana, it can be assumed that there is going to be a negative impact on job security in this sector. The consequences of COVID 19 lockdown is not only problem in Botswana but also in Europe. As a result The European Commission has adopted a package of measures that will provide significant relief to the transport sector by solving practical problems, removing administrative burdens, and increasing flexibility. This package includes measures to support the aviation, rail, maritime, inland navigation and road sectors, ensuring that no single player is hit harder than any other, as the entire sector moves on from the travel restrictions put in place during the coronavirus pandemic (European Commission, 2020).

1.4 Literature Review

A good transport system depends on a reliable transport infrastructure. Transport infrastructure requires large investments and requires regular maintenance to prevent it from being unsuitable for motorists to use (Mtizi, 2017). Roads in Botswana are managed and maintained by two authorities; local authorities and central government. The Roads Department exists to serve as the focal point for policy and operational direction pertaining to road design, road construction and road maintenance in line with the Public Roads Act (MTC). In order for someone to drive a taxi/minibus/combi they should have Professional Driving Permit (**PRDP**). For taxis/minibus/combis to operate; they also need a BA permit that is issued by Department of Transport.

There are high rates of sexual harassment reported from taxi drivers, reckless driving and traffic crimes committed. Law Enforcement needs to be held more accountable during road blocks so that they can actually enforce the laws. Police officers set up illegal road blocks in order to collect money from road users. The increase in the number of traffic offenders getting off using bribes is another government challenge. Weak enforcement of traffic regulations, vehicle inspection, and driver behaviour and traffic management is a common practise in many African cities (Mtizi, 2017).

Public transporters as employers of masses of unemployed people in Botswana are mostly challenged amongst other things with revenue integrity in growth of their businesses. The government is mostly the regulator of public transporters in terms of fares and operational modalities. Good revenue integrity enables a much more organized type of service to be provided. Poor revenue integrity necessitates a less formal type of operation. Robust systems and procedures, which are workable within prevailing cultural and ethical characteristics, are usually required if revenue is to be adequately protected, (Kanono, 25 March 2020). (Chen, Yang, Wang and Barnighausen, 2020) notes that the dark cloud has fallen on public transporters due to Corona Virus Dieses 19 (COVID-19) which has brought down public transporter revenue to almost zero since beginning of this pandemic in China. The government of Botswana like most nations affected by COVID-19 imposed extreme social distancing through lockdown measures discouraging any movement by public transporters except those transporting people involved in essential services and who should get special permit before doing so, as read with Statutory Instrument No. 61 of 2020 (Botswana Government Gazette, 2020). On the contrary even if they were to be allowed to operate, the public that uses this means of transport was also regulated to be under total lockdown from the second of April 2020 to the eighth of May 2020. For the few operators who were allowed to operate, the costs of operating were made too high for one to realise any reasonable profit, these were some of the things imposed for the few operating in lockdown; “continuous disinfection of seats, door handles and surfaces, operators encouraged to use sanitizer dispensers or water and soap at the doors of public service vehicles, operators should have clinical waste containers for disposal of used tissues”, (Kanono, 25 March 2020).

1.5 Research Methodology

1.5.1 Research Design

This paper adopted a quantitative approach. A total of 100 questionnaires were administered. The study chose 100 drivers/operators of all Gaborone combi/taxi routes (Gabane, Tlokweng, Broadhurst, Mogoditshane, Ledumang, blocks, Mmopane, Naledi etc.) The population comprised public transport drivers in Botswana who could not be quantified owing to the complexity of collecting such statistics. Data collected in this study was analyzed using SPSS version.

1.5.2 Research Objectives

1. To determine the level of job satisfaction that exists among the local public transport drivers
2. To define the level of career growth ambition among the local public transport drivers
3. To establish the determinants of driver's participation in the public transport sector.
4. To make recommendations for sustainable economic growth and diversification in the local public transport industry

1.6 Results/Findings

1.6.1. The composition of the respondents was 93.5% male and 6.5% female public transport drivers in Botswana.

1.6.2. The age distribution was found to be 13% for 16-26 age group, 44% for 27- 37 age group, 4% of 49-59 age group and 3% above 60 years.

1.6.3. Only 2% of the cohort does not have any form of formal education. 26% of the 98% with formal education have tertiary qualifications.

1.6.4. The majority of respondents 67.4% were found to have been in the industry for 6 years or less with only 5.4% having been in the industry for 16 years or more.

1.6.5. Of the respondents 67% showed interest for inclusion in the mainstream employment sector. The 33% who preferred to remain in the industry cited better remuneration, better working conditions, flexibility of work conditions as reasons for their preference to stay.

1.6.6. The research sought to determine if there is any correlation between age and period that the Public Sector drivers remain in their Industry, the results reveal that the correlation between age and the period of employment was found to be significant at the 0.000 level (2-tailed)

Table 1.1: Gender and reasons for staying in public sector transport industry

Correlations

			Age of respondent	For how long have you been working as a Combi driver?
Spearman's rho	Age of respondent	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.584**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	92	92
	For how long have you been working as a Combi driver?	Correlation Coefficient	.584**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	92	92

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

1.6.7. The research also sought to determine if there was any correlation between gender and reasons for staying on the job. The results for the correlation between gender and reasons for staying in public sector transport industry could not be computed owing to the sample size and/or constitution of sample where there were only 6 females and 86 males.

Table 1.2. Gender and one’s wish to join another similar organisation

			Correlations	
			Age of respondent	Would you want to change employment to join organisations in the same capacity?
Spearman's rho	Age of respondent	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.050
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.633
		N	92	92
	Would you want to change employment to join organisations in the same capacity?	Correlation Coefficient	.050	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.633	.
		N	92	92

1.6.8. It also sought to determine if age was a determinant factor to migrate to the mainstream industry. Table 1.2 shows that correlation was found between age and effort to seek employment in the mainstream industry at a correlation coefficient value of 1.000 (2-tailed).

1.7. Conclusions

Botswana public transport sector is creating employment even for people with formal education qualifications who cannot be absorbed in other industries. The employment trends in the industry indicate high level of turnover on the part of drivers. The majority of drivers interviewed however showed willingness to stay in the industry in the long term. The paper also concluded that there is poor sustainability of businesses in the industry due to financial management failures or lack of re-capitalising. The industry if correctly regulated can also grow itself into the mainstream and become a lifelong career. Furthermore; Government should promote the introduction of clusters for combi business in order to help the public transport industry to grow and ensure sustainability. In conclusion; Government and public transport sector should sit down and come up with a medium-term (five years) public transport plan and strategy to ensure sustainability of the Industry. The study mainly focused on Gaborone region. It will be of great benefit to policy makers if other authors can expand this study at national level. With the development of COVID19 government of Botswana should do deeper analysis on how much this sector was affected by COVID 19 national lockdown in Botswana. There is need for Government to form a policy that should engage operators in this sector to register their employees and or themselves in order to make it easy for government to easily trace them.

1.8. Recommendations

1.8.1 Botswana government should review policies that govern public transport industry to make the industry a pensionable and life long career.

1.8.2. To help the public transport industry develop, and be transporter of choice, Government should make it mandatory that every long distance (300 km +) combi/bus should have a toilet and infants change room.

1.8.3. To mitigate on business bankruptcy that result from accidents, Government should introduce point reduction system on PRDP. Each time a combi/bus/taxi driver causes accidents; points should be deducted from their PRDP. This system may improve quality of driving amongst public transport drivers and enhance business sustainability.

1.8.4. To enhance easy access which in turn will grow the industry into the mainstream, Botswana government should benchmark with other countries. For example in China people use WeChat app to find taxis. This means people can get services at their convenience. This system is cost effective and reduces waiting time because the nearest taxi to own location can come.

1.8.5. Public transport sector should develop and implement standards and targets that help improve services and make public transport attractive for combi/taxi/bus drivers. When the industry is regularized it can become professional.

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