

Gender, Mobility and Livelihoods: Women in Ibadan's Commercial Transportation Sector, 2000-2024

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Abstract

Ibadan, the largest city in Oyo State and a busy hub of commercial activities, has experienced an emergence and transformative shift in the role of women within the transportation sector. Historically, the field had been male-dominated. While some studies have examined women's roles in Nigeria's informal sectors, scant attention has been paid to the socioeconomic significance of women in the commercial transportation sector in Ibadan. This study was therefore, designed to examine women's involvement in the transportation sector in Ibadan between 1999 and 2024. Empirical and descriptive designs were adopted. This study utilised the qualitative research method. Primary data was collected from twenty-five in-depth interviews (IDI) with commercial drivers (both male and female) and passengers involved in the tricycle and motorcycle transport business. Secondary data were collected through books, journals and media publications. Data were content analysed. Despite the odds of societal biases and financial constraints, women in the Ibadan transport sector contribute significantly to economic growth, employment creation, and community development. The study stresses the significance of supporting women's participation in transport enterprise as a means to promoting sustainable economic development further while emphasising the necessity for targeted interventions, including mentoring initiatives, capacity-building programmes and gender-sensitive policies.

Keywords: *Keke, Okada, socio-economic significance, women in the commercial transportation sector*

1. Introduction

The transport sector plays a vital role in the socio-economic development of any region, providing essential services for the movement of people and goods, facilitating trade, access to markets and economic growth. In Nigeria, transport remains a crucial sector, contributing significantly to the country's gross domestic product (GDP) and serving as a primary means of connecting rural and urban areas. Extant studies in the early 1990s estimated that transport contributed around 3% of GDP in the late 1990s (Ugboaja, 2013). From the government economic reports, transport sector witnessed consistent share of around 2.7% during 2006-2010. By 2018-2022, the sector was averaging around 3%. Therefore, from 2020s, despite the dominant role played by the sector by contributing ₦2.4 trillion in 2020, there was decline from about ₦2.4 trillion¹ in years after which reflects a shift in activity level in the Nigerian economy due to economic pressures like rising operating costs and subsidy removal in 2023. Within this dynamic and growing sector, the role of women in transport management has emerged as a major area of interest, especially in cities like Ibadan, Nigeria's third-largest city and the capital of Oyo State.

Interestingly, recent socio-economic changes have led to a shift in gender roles, with more women entering various sectors traditionally dominated by men, including the commercial transport sector. These women are gradually becoming more visible, not only as workers within the transport system (for example, drivers, conductors and ticket sellers) but also as owners of their tricycles and motorcycles, thus, shaping the future of the sector. Ibadan, with its growing population and expanding urbanization, relies heavily on a robust and functional transport system (Odufuwa, 2012). The city is known for its bustling markets, economic activities, and cultural significance, which demand an efficient transport network. Nevertheless, public transport in Ibadan consists primarily of minibuses, motorcycles (locally known as "Okadas"), tricycles (popularly called "Keke"), taxis, and a limited number of private transport

¹ 1US\$ = 1,378 naira, approximately.

companies. With increasing urbanization, Ibadan has experienced challenges such as traffic congestion, poor road infrastructure and limited public transport systems coupled with the ongoing economic hardship in the country (Odufuwa (2012)). These challenges have created windows of opportunities for innovative approaches, where women have started coming in large numbers to join the sector to make ends meet.

This study, therefore, showcases women's involvement in the commercial transport sector in Ibadan, by interrogating their significant contributions to their economic well-being and the development of the society at large.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

The commercial transportation sector in Nigeria has long been male-dominated, reflecting entrenched socio-cultural norms and systemic gender biases. In cities like Ibadan, a major urban centre in Southwestern Nigeria, this male dominance is particularly pronounced. Women's entry into this sector has been slow and fraught with challenges, despite the growing recognition of the vital role women play in economic and social development.

Over the past two decades (2000-2026), economic pressures such as rising unemployment, urbanization, and poverty have pushed women to explore traditionally male-dominated sectors, including commercial transportation. Women's participation in the sector has the potential to enhance household incomes, promote gender equity, reduce poverty, and contribute to improved urban mobility. However, their involvement remains minimal and poorly documented, particularly in Ibadan, due to numerous socio-cultural, financial, and institutional barriers.

Some of these challenges are not limited to societal stereotypes that perceive driving and transport operations as roles unfit for women, lack of access to capital to acquire Keke or Okada, gender-based harassment, and limited government policies that support women's involvement in transportation. These barriers not only discourage women's participation but also undermine the broader socio-economic benefits that their involvement could bring to families, communities and the economy at large.

While some studies have examined women's roles in Nigeria's informal sectors, there is a notable dearth of research specifically addressing the socio-economic significance of women in the commercial transportation sector in Ibadan. Little is known about their contributions to family welfare, poverty alleviation, and gender inclusion, as well as the barriers they face and the policies that could promote their participation. This knowledge gap hinders the development of targeted interventions that could empower women in this sector and enhance its economic and social impacts.

Thus, the focus of this study addresses the limited understanding of the socio-economic significance of women in the commercial transportation sector in Ibadan between 2000 and 2024, with a focus on their contributions, challenges, and the potential for gender-inclusive development. Addressing this problem is essential for promoting gender equity, economic empowerment and sustainable urban transportation in Nigeria.

1.2. Research Objectives

The primary aim of this research is to examine the socio-economic significance of women in the commercial transportation sector in Ibadan, Nigeria, 2000-2024. It is within this context that the study sets out to actualise the following objectives:

- i. Trace the involvement of women in commercial transportation in Ibadan before 1999;
- ii. Examine the extent of women's participation in commercial transportation in Ibadan between 1999 and 2024;

iii. Investigate the contributions of women in the commercial transportation sector to the socio-economic development of Ibadan and

iv. Analyse the challenges faced by women in commercial transportation and how the problems were tackled within the scope of the study.

1.3. Research Questions

Emanating from the objectives of this study, the work attempts to ask and answer the following questions:

i. In what ways were women involved in commercial transportation in Ibadan before 1999?

ii. To what extent did women participate in commercial transportation in Ibadan between 1999 and 2024?

iii. What were the contributions of women in the commercial transportation sector to the socio-economic development of Ibadan?

iv. What were the challenges faced by women in commercial transportation and how were the problems being tackled during our period?

1.4. Conceptual Framework

This study conceptualises women's involvement in the commercial transportation sector as a productive source of revenue scheme whose socio-economic significance is shaped by institutional structures, gender relations and market conditions over a period of time. The study is situated within broader contexts of gender and development (GAD) theory, social capital theory, the sustainable livelihoods framework, feminist economics theory and the capability approach. The framework explains how and under what conditions would women's participation translate into meaningful socio-economic outcomes.

GAD theory (Moser, 1993; Miller & Razavi, 1995) for instance, shifts attention from women as passive beneficiaries to women as economic actors embedded within gendered power relations. It emphasises how institutions, norms, and policies position women's access to resources and opportunities. It further emphasizes the importance of addressing gender inequalities and empowering women to participate actively in economic activities. It highlights the need for women's inclusion in non-traditional roles, such as transportation. The theory explains how women were able to enter a male-dominated transport sector. It further states their roles and marginalisation in sector. It structures union/association rules, gender norms, and licensing systems as operational differences not individual shortcomings.

The social capital concept (Bourdieu, 1986; Putnam, 2000) explains how resources are accessed through networks, trust, and institutional membership. It is significant to the study as transport associations/unions, cooperatives, and informal associations shape access to routes and information, protection from harassment and collective bargaining power while helping to explain variations in women's outcomes despite similar participation levels.

The sustainable livelihoods framework (SLF) (Chambers & Conway, 1992; Scoones, 1998) argues that livelihoods depend on access to five forms of capital (human, financial, physical, social, and natural), mediated by institutions and vulnerability contexts. Thus, commercial transportation is conceptualised as a livelihood strategy where women's socio-economic outcomes depend to a large extent on access to: financial capital such as credit or savings, human capital like training and skills, physical capital such as infrastructure and vehicles as well as social capital that entails networks, association, unions and others.

Feminist economics theory critiques traditional economic systems for neglecting women's contributions to labour markets, particularly informal sectors. It advocates for the recognition of women's economic participation as being germane to societal development. These frameworks provide a lens for examining

women's contributions to the transportation sector in Ibadan and their broader socio-economic implications.

The capability approach (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2000) evaluates development not only by income but by people's real freedoms and choices. The framework moves the analysis of women in the commercial transport sector beyond income generation to social recognition, mobility autonomy and decision-making power while it captures long-term empowerment outcomes from transport work.

2. Research Methodology

The methodology for this study is designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of women in Ibadan's commercial transportation sector. The approach adopted was qualitative. Through purposive sampling, 25 in-depth interviews (IDIs) were conducted with commercial drivers (both male and female), leaders of transport unions as well as commuters between the ages of 20 and 60 years in high-brow commercial areas in Ibadan. These were Ring-Road, Dugbe, Mokola, Sango, Gate, Iwo Road, Orita-Challenge, Ogunpa, Apata and Oja-Oba. The respondents were selected because of their knowledge and involvement in the commercial tricycle and motorcycle transport business. The method adopted is appropriate for understanding the current state of women's participation, personal experiences, their socio-economic impact, and the challenges they face in the sector. Secondary sources include articles in Journals, books and other relevant publications, while data were content analysed. The study adhered to ethical guidelines, ensuring that all participants gave consent before participating. The anonymity and confidentiality of participants were maintained, and sensitive information was handled with care. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Language barrier was put into consideration as interview was conducted in both official (English) and local languages in order to avoid denial of non-literate respondents while data gathered were adequately transcribed into English language to avoid bias.

2.1. Significance of the Study

The study is significant for several reasons, addressing both academic and practical needs in the context of gender inclusion, economic growth and social development. First, this research highlights the significant roles of women in a traditionally male-dominated sector, challenging gender stereotypes and promoting gender equality. By showcasing women's contributions in the commercial transportation business and to also shed light on how women's participation in the sector can stimulate economic growth in Ibadan. By examining their roles in job creation, entrepreneurship, and capacity building, the research offers insights into how gender inclusion in this sector can contribute meaningfully to local and national economic development. Understanding the geographical landscape of Ibadan, as she faces various urban transport issues such as traffic congestion, inadequate infrastructure, and inefficient public transport systems, this study provides a unique perspective on how women's involvement in commercial transport enterprise could introduce new approaches to problem-solving schemes.

In addition, the case of Ibadan could serve as a model for other cities in Nigeria and Africa, where women's roles in similar sectors like transport remain underexplored. The findings from this study can inspire similar research and policy interventions in other sectors and regions, thus, promoting broader socio-economic empowerment for women. This study is therefore, significant because it provides valuable insights into how women's participation in the commercial transportation sector can enhance gender equality, economic growth, and social development in Ibadan, Nigeria. The findings can equally influence policy, encourage greater inclusion of women in the sector and contribute to more effective and equitable transport management.

2.2. Scope of the Study

The study focuses on women in the commercial transportation Sector in Ibadan, Nigeria, 1999-2024. Focus group discussions were conducted with selected groups of women on the tarmac who were involved in the commercial transport sector to explore common experiences, barriers, and strategies for

success. These discussions were useful in uncovering shared socio-economic patterns and community-level challenges.

3. Literature Review

The connection of gender with mobility and livelihoods has been studied through a variety of theoretical lenses. Basic studies such as Sen's (1999) and Kabeer's (1999; 2001) offer a framework for understanding how structural inequalities shape women's access to economic and transport opportunities. Moser's (1993) approach focusses on the importance of gender-sensitive policy interventions, while Uteng and Cresswell (2008) highlight *gendered mobilities* that reveal how transport systems reproduce social imbalance.

Chambers and Conway (1992) and Scoones (1998) in livelihood studies, set the foundation for understanding multifaceted income strategies in rural and urban contexts, stressing how mobility functions as a movement and at the same as an enabler of economic resilience. These frameworks combine situate mobility not merely as transport, but as embedded within gendered social structures that influence life chances (Sen, 1999; Kabeer, 1999; Moser, 1993; Uteng & Cresswell, 2008).

Our study reveals that gender differences in intra-urban travel behaviour are observed, with women generally having shorter work trip distances in high and medium-density areas (Abidemi, 2002). The work of Asinyanbola (2010) reveals how urban transportation infrastructure and travel have greater negative effects on the psychological well-being of women compared to men in Ibadan while Fapohunda (2012) discusses the role of women in the informal sector in Nigeria including challenges and the need for policies to support women's participation in the transport sector. Recent research emphasizes how gender modifies transport participation. Ajibade's (2020) work on urban transport in Ibadan shows systemic challenges women encounter, which include exclusionary labour practices, violence and harassment from male counterparts. In the same vein, Odebiyi and Oyetola (2019) reveal that women's participation in commercial transport sector is limited by practical barriers and social norms such as inadequate provision of capital and lack of training.

Odufuwa (2012) examines the impact of inefficient public transport on the livelihood of women in the traditional city of Ibadan. Akande (2013) explores the informal economy of head portage (Alabaru) in Ibadan but does not specifically address the social economic significance of women in the commercial transportation sector. Bishop *et al.* (2018) did a literature review on safe motorcycle and Three-wheeler use for rural transportation but does not address women involvement in commercial transport of tricycle and motorcycle in Ibadan during our period. Ajayi (2022) and Folawewo and Oluwaseun (2022) further argue on how female in commercial transport sector contribute to urban economies. To them, this indicate that women's earnings in transport are vital to family survival but remain unrecognised. Aluko's (2018) study examines commercial motorcycle safety concerns. It emphasises how women's livelihoods interconnect with some risk, while lack of training and poor regulation policy extremely affect female riders and the passengers.

Safety concerns in commercial motorcycle operations remain a persistent issue, requiring solutions that consider driver behaviour and organizational culture (Aluko, 2018). The paper discusses commercial motorcycle in Nigeria but did not cover women's involvement in commercial transportation of tricycle and motorcycle in Ibadan within our time frame. Ranita and Siddin (2019) discusses the room and productivity of women workers in the informal sector without focusing on the social economic significance of women in the commercial sector in Ibadan. Women's travel patterns differ significantly from men's, influenced by social, cultural, economic, and demographic factors, necessitating more representative public transportation designs (Hayati *et al.*, 2020). The paper reviews literature on women's travel behaviour and the need for transportation infrastructure design support sustainable transportation for women.

Despite growing interest in women's participation in logistics and transport, there is insufficient research in this area, especially in the aviation, maritime, and rail sectors (Rahman, 2020). The paper provides a bibliometric analysis of the limited research on women's involvement in the logistics and transport

sectors. Nevertheless, women entrepreneurs in transport face unique challenges due to intersecting factors like patriarchal culture and insufficient infrastructure (Mogaji, 2024). The paper discusses the importance of studying the experiences of women entrepreneurs in the male-dominated transportation industry in Africa.

These studies collectively emphasize the importance of understanding and addressing the challenges surrounding women's involvement in transportation to promote gender equality, improve safety, and promote sustainable transportation systems. Recent literature highlights the need for more research on women's involvement in transportation, particularly in developing countries.

3.1. Tricycle and Motorcycle Transportation in Ibadan, Nigeria, Before 1999

Ibadan, as one of the largest and oldest cities in Nigeria, has been a major centre for trade, education, and administration since the colonial period. Traditionally, transportation in Ibadan relied on public buses (*molues* and mini-buses). These were the dominant means of transportation for people and goods, particularly for long and medium distances within the city and its outskirts. In addition, taxis (cars), provided transportation services for shorter distances but were expensive for many low-income earners. Also, foot travel for short distances, walking remained a prevalent option, especially for those who could not afford other means of transportation.

Motorcycles, popularly known as "Okada" in Nigeria generally and Ibadan in particular were introduced as a commercial mode of transportation in the late 1970s and gained some presence in the 1980s. However, before 1999, their usage in Ibadan was not widespread for several reasons. These included limited availability. Motorcycles were relatively expensive, as such, a few individuals owned them. Hence, their commercial use remained minimal. It is worth noting that motorcycle transportation was informal, with no regulatory frameworks, licenses, or organized unions overseeing their operations. Riders operated independently, mostly serving rural areas and neighbourhoods where buses and taxis were scarce. Also, there was socio-cultural resistance to its adoption. They were perceived as unsafe, and societal norms discouraged their adoption, particularly in urban centres like Ibadan. Many people associate motorcycles with risk and accidents. There were equally economic constraints as most residents of Ibadan, particularly low-income earners, were reluctant to pay for motorcycle rides, as other transport options (buses and taxis) were considered more affordable and safer for transporting passengers. Despite these challenges, motorcycles gained traction in rural and peri-urban areas of Ibadan where road infrastructure was poor, and access to conventional transport was limited. They were particularly useful for navigating narrow or unpaved roads, making them indispensable in remote areas.

Tricycles, also known as Keke, were even less common than motorcycles before 1999. Tricycles as a means of transportation had not yet become a mainstream option in Nigeria during this period due to several factors such as scarcity of tricycles. Tricycles were rarely used for commercial purposes before 1999. Most of the tricycles available were for private use or small-scale goods transportation. Also, tricycles were not locally manufactured but were imported from countries like India, where they were more commonly used. The high cost of importation limited their availability and affordability for commercial use. Like motorcycles, tricycles faced cultural resistance, as they were considered unconventional, unreliable, and inferior compared to buses and taxis. Many residents did not view tricycles as a viable mode of public transportation. The poor state of many urban and rural roads in Ibadan further hindered the adoption of tricycles. The vehicles, which were relatively light and fragile, were unsuitable for navigating Ibadan's rugged and often poorly maintained roads.

Before 1999, transportation in Ibadan especially the operation of motorcycles and tricycles was exclusively male-dominated. Women were virtually absent from the industry due to societal norms that assigned driving and commercial transport operations as masculine roles. Women were expected to focus on domestic responsibilities or other informal sectors, such as trading and farming. The lack of female involvement in motorcycle and tricycle transportation during this period further reinforced the slow adoption of these modes as viable alternatives to buses and taxis.

In a nutshell, tricycles and motorcycles were not major components of Ibadan's transportation system before 1999. While motorcycles began to emerge as informal transport options in remote areas, their adoption was slow, primarily due to socio-cultural, economic, and infrastructural challenges. Tricycles, on the other hand, were largely absent from the transportation landscape. This period laid the foundation for the subsequent growth of motorcycles and tricycles as popular and indispensable modes of transport in Ibadan in the 21st century.

3.2. The Nature of Tricycle and Motorcycle Transportation in Ibadan, Nigeria, from 1999

From 1999 onwards, tricycle and motorcycle transportation in Ibadan witnessed significant growth and transformation, becoming integral components of the city's transportation system. The expansion was influenced by factors such as urbanization, population growth, economic pressures, and government policies. This period saw motorcycles (commonly referred to as Okadas) and tricycles (known as Keke) emerge as popular, flexible, and affordable modes of transportation, catering for diverse socio-economic groups in the city.

Thus, motorcycles became a prevalent mode of commercial transportation in Ibadan from 1999, driven by several socio-economic and infrastructural factors. For instance, the rapid growth of Ibadan's population, fuelled by urbanization and rural-to-urban migration, increased the demand for public transportation. It must be noted that as the city expanded, its road infrastructure struggled to keep pace, leading to severe traffic congestion. Motorcycles became a preferred mode of transportation due to their ability to manoeuvre through traffic and reach destinations faster than buses and taxis. Okadas further provided transport solutions to peri-urban and rural areas with poor road networks, where buses and taxis could not operate effectively.

Similarly, the motorcycle transport business became a viable source of livelihood for unemployed youths, particularly in the post-military era marked by economic reforms and high unemployment rates. Many people invested in motorcycles as a means of self-employment. Motorcycles also offered a cheaper and more accessible alternative to taxis for short and medium distances, making them appealing to low-income earners.

The informal nature further aids its rapid expansion as the sector initially operated with minimal regulation. Riders often lacked proper training or licensing, leading to a chaotic but booming industry. Okada riders could quickly adapt to changes in demand, offering transport services during peak hours, late at night, or in areas inaccessible to larger vehicles.

In the same vein, the emergence of tricycles in Ibadan's transportation system began after 1999. It was motivated by targeted government interventions and changing urban transport needs. The Policy Initiatives and Adoption of the Keke National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) became widely adopted following the launch of the Keke NAPEP by the Nigerian government in the early 2000s. This programme aimed at providing affordable transportation options as well as creating jobs for unemployed youths. Under the Keke NAPEP programme, tricycles were made more accessible to operators through government subsidies and loan schemes. This led to a significant increase in their use for commercial purposes. The tricycle business therefore became popular for medium-distance travel within Ibadan, bridging the gap between motorcycles (suited for short distances) and minibuses (for longer routes). Compared to motorcycles, tricycles offered greater comfort and safety, particularly for families and groups. Keke carries more passengers and goods, making them cost-effective. As a result, tricycles became essential in Ibadan's peri-urban and densely populated areas, where roads were too narrow or poorly maintained for buses to operate efficiently.

3.3. Government Interventions and Policies

In the early 2000s, the Nigerian government launched the NAPEP to address the high rate of poverty and unemployment in the country. A prominent part of the programme of the NAPEP was the introduction of tricycles, commonly known as Keke NAPEP, as a means of public transportation. This initiative aimed at providing affordable transport options and at the same time creating employment opportunities for

youths and reducing urban poverty. Under NAPEP, tricycles were distributed to beneficiaries through subsidized loans and hire-purchase agreements, and the development to a large extent facilitated tricycle machine's entry into the transportation sector.

The Oyo State government further complemented federal efforts by implementing its programmes to promote tricycle and motorcycle transportation. These initiatives often involved purchasing tricycles and motorcycles and distributing them to unemployed youths at subsidized rates or through hire-purchase schemes. The chief aims were to reduce the unemployment rate, alleviate poverty and improve urban mobility. For instance, in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, similar programmes were considered. It involved the state government and politicians. They purchased tricycles and motorcycles, and handed them over to interested transporters at subsidized rates, to ease transportation stress as well as to reduce the unemployment rate among the youths and to alleviate poverty.

To ensure the safety and efficiency of tricycle and motorcycle operations, the government introduced regulatory measures, including mandatory registration and licensing of tricycles and motorcycles to monitor and control their operations. These policies focused on poverty alleviation, employment generation, safety enhancement, and urban mobility improvement. There was implementation of training programmes for operators to enhance their knowledge of traffic rules and safe driving practices while the enforcement of traffic laws was meant to strengthen the enforcement of traffic regulations to reduce accidents and improve overall road safety. These initiatives contributed to the widespread adoption of tricycles and motorcycles as vital components of the urban transport system in the city.

In response to rising accident rates and safety concerns involving motorcycles, some state governments implemented policies restricting or banning motorcycle operations in specific urban areas. These measures aimed to reduce traffic accidents and curb criminal activities associated with motorcycles. As a result, there was a shift towards promoting tricycles as a safer alternative for commercial transportation. For example, in Lagos State, the ban on motorcycles in certain locations led to an increased reliance on tricycles for public transport, a trend that influenced transportation policies in other cities, including Ibadan.

In order to accommodate the increasing number of tricycles and motorcycles on the road, some administrations invested in infrastructure development, such as establishing specific parking zones for tricycles and motorcycles to reduce congestion and organize their operations. Also, in some cases, they create dedicated lanes so as to improve the flow of tricycle and motorcycle traffic and promote safety for road users. Our period equally saw the formation and recognition of unions for tricycle and motorcycle operators, such as the Amalgamated Commercial Motorcycle Riders Association of Nigeria (ACOMORAN). These unions played a crucial role in advocating for the rights of operators, facilitating training programmes, and ensuring compliance with government regulations.

4. Findings

The involvement of women in transport management in Ibadan, Nigeria, has significant economic implications. Their entry into the sector contributes significantly to the local economy in diverse ways. This ranges from the creation of employment opportunities, and community service, to employer of labour. As women establish themselves as operators in the transport sector, they generate employment for others. Women often engage in informal transport services, such as ride-sharing or small-scale logistics. This involvement supports local economies by providing flexible employment options, particularly for individuals who may not have access to formal employment.

Women's engagement in commercial transport had garnered greater financial independence for them. This has promoted their economic status and decision-making power. The empowerment contributes to a reasonable extent to improving living standards for their families and immediate communities. Owners of transport businesses, such as motorcycles and tricycles contribute to the local economy by promoting entrepreneurship. These enterprises not only generate income for the owners but also contribute to the economic tax base which in turn serve as internally generated revenue for the local governments to carry out their earmarked social projects for the benefit of the citizenry.

Kemi Ajayi explained that she was formerly into retailing pharmaceutical products, at Oye Ekiti, Ekiti State. Around 2020, she ran bankrupt of about 1.5 million naira due to *Owo anabo* (counterfeit money) as a result; her family lost all the savings, investments and properties in the course of raising money to pay back. They were left with no means of survival. She agreed with her husband to relocate to Ibadan for a greener pasture in 2022. By March of the same year, she got Keke on hire-purchase at the rate of 3.6 million naira, to remit 5,000 naira every day to the dealer. She said makes approximately 15,000 daily (Kemi Ajayi).

She noted that her husband was sceptical about joining the business at the initial stage, after about three months of her active engagement and having seen what she rings home daily, he obliged. She noted that the financial prospects of her family have tremendously improved. That by March 3rd, 2025, she would complete the payment while she becomes the bonafide owner of the Keke. She, therefore, encouraged women to gain employment. She noted that gone are the days when some jobs are seen as men's but nowadays, women should think outside the box as long as such a job is not illegal.

While the role of drivers has traditionally been dominated by men, a growing number of women are now working as drivers of motorcycles and tricycles. However, the kernel of this study is to interrogate the socio-economic significance of women that are engaged in *Keke and Okada* as commercial drivers. How their participation contributes to their household income as well as the development of their communities/societies as the case may be.

There is a high rate of women's involvement in transportation in Ibadan. With a specific focus on Marwa riders, it was culled from the findings that women riders were just about ten per cent. Regarding the operations, the results of the study show that women riders were no longer involved in the operations of the association. The absence of women riders in the operational management of the association is because the new administrative system does not permit any form of union (association). The new administrative system in the parks is known as the Parking Management System (PMS). To this, three participants reiterated:

“...There is no longer an association. The association has long been disbanded... what we have now is the Parking Management System (PMS). I doubt if any woman is involved in ticketing. In the past women held some positions. Right now, women riders teach other intending female riders the art of the business (Aunty Ope).”

“...there are no associations. Newly introduced government policies do not make it easy for anyone or even women to be involved in association politics. I know of only 1 woman that is involved. Her name is Deborah. She is known as. “First Lady”. She started with me and went to radio stations for advocacies...the existing system makes it more difficult for women to engage in the operations of the park.”

In the words of Baba Legba, “... women are not involved. They are virtually absent in the sales of ticketing. I am not sure about how involved women are in the associations. But I will direct you to a man who will direct you to women who can answer all your questions.”

Virtually all the women interviewed got into the transportation business because of a lack of alternatives. It was observed from the responses that women in transportation would prefer an alternate source of income. All the women interviewed were experts in their field of study/trade. While possessing other skills like tailoring, hairdressing, and the art of trading, the least educated women had their primary school leaving certificates. Surprisingly, educational backgrounds ranged from primary school certificates to polytechnic, NCE and to university degrees. While the field study revealed that about 90% of the female drivers would prefer other means of generating income, albeit, these female riders have been able to substantially contribute in their respective homes.

The average take home of a female driver who does an 8 am-5 pm riding shift is about ₦10,000. In a month the average income of these women is estimated to be about ₦150,000. Interestingly, the average monthly income of female riders (₦150,000) exceeds the new minimum wage for civil servants in

Nigeria by 100%, demonstrating the substantial earning potential of women in transportation. It was also observed from the field study that these women earn more than a lot of University, Polytechnic and NCE graduates. In essence, these women riders play a vital role in contributing significantly to their households and, by extension, driving economic growth and development in the city. Empowering women in any society is paramount, as it unlocks their potential, fosters economic resilience, and promotes inclusive development.

To this, a rider rehashed: from my previous answer, you can see that one of the main economic contributions is that of women empowerment. Women riders significantly, impact on poverty alleviation.

“... *ti ise ba ti ku ro ninu oro obirin, Kekere ni eleyi ti o ku* (Aunty Ope explained that once you alleviate poverty in a woman’s life, then all other challenges are minor).”

The economic activities generated by women in the transport sector have a multiplier effect on the local economy as mentioned earlier. As they earn income, they patronise the local markets by purchasing goods and services. This encourages economic growth within the community as well as income generation for the government through taxes. This revenue is reinvested into public services and infrastructure development by the government which further supports the economic growth of the country at large.

The impact of women in the commercial transport sector in Ibadan goes beyond the transport sector itself. For instance, their involvement in the business has challenged gender norms against the notion that commercial transportation is exclusively reserved for males. This barrier has been successfully broken. Their involvement improves safety and inclusivity and further creates opportunities for social mobility and economic empowerment. Also, their involvement promotes gender equality, expansive societal change, and reduction in violence and harassment as well as strengthening the social fabric of their societies. They further promote inclusive transport systems, conducive and safer, while providing leadership in various segments within their communities

In the same vein, the rate at which the numerical strength of women's involvement in the commercial transport sector grows challenges long-standing gender stereotypes that associate the sector with masculinity. By breaking into leadership roles and operating businesses within the transport industry, women demonstrate that they are equally capable of excelling in traditionally male-dominated sectors. As more women participate in the sector, it encourages the hiring of female employees across various roles within the transport system. This contributes to creating a more gender-balanced workforce and opens the doors for women to assume greater roles in other industries as well. The visibility of women in the sector serves as an inspiration for younger generations, demonstrating that women can succeed in diverse fields. Their representation in the sector also pushes for greater gender inclusivity in public life, helping to reshape societal perceptions of women's roles.

There is increased social stigma connected with working in a male-dominated field. Despite facing increased social stigma in a male-dominated field, female riders in the transport sector have gained financial independence and recognition for their unique strengths. Notably, most passengers prefer female riders, citing their careful and attentive nature during rides.

Amarachi Chukwuoke explained the role of women’s involvement in transportation and its impact on community development when she observed that:

“When you critically look at it, riding a tricycle is not a feminine job. It is hard. Most of us are into it because we do not have a choice. Nevertheless, gender has nothing to do with it. We aid community development by transporting people who do not have their own means of transport.”

In addition, women within the commercial transport sector often prioritize safety, especially for vulnerable groups such as women, children, and the elderly. They advocate for and implement policies that reduce harassment and violence on public transport, making travel safer for all. In response to concerns about safety and harassment, some women-led initiatives have introduced women-only

transport services, providing a safer option for female passengers. This helps to build trust in public transportation systems and encourages more women to use public transport.

Women in the commercial transport sector bring a unique understanding of the challenges faced by female commuters. Their influence helps to create transport systems that are more responsive to these needs, resulting in services that are better tailored to the safety and comfort of all users.

Similarly, as women become more prominent in the sector, they improve transportation services as their efforts contribute to making transport more accessible and affordable. This increased mobility allows women from all socio-economic backgrounds to access education, healthcare, and job opportunities, improving their social and economic standing. By improving transport systems, women in the sector bridge the gap between urban and rural areas by increasing connectivity. This, in turn, reduces the social barriers that can prevent marginalized groups from accessing essential services and participating fully in social and economic life.

Also, women who gain employment or own businesses in the commercial transport sector often reinvest their earnings into their families and communities. This financial contribution supports children's education, healthcare, and overall family welfare, leading to stronger, more stable households. They frequently engage in community development activities. Through their businesses or roles, they create networks and opportunities that benefit their communities, such as organizing transport cooperatives, contributing to local development projects, or offering mentorship to other women who may be sceptical about women's security in the business.

Furthermore, women in the commercial transport sector often become advocates for creating safe work environments for female employees in the transport sector. By implementing anti-harassment policies and enforcing protective measures, they create safer spaces for both passengers and workers. On this note, women in leadership roles often introduce gender-sensitive training for transport workers, which educates them about respecting women's rights and maintaining professional conduct. This helps create a more respectful environment for all employees and customers/passengers, improving the social atmosphere within the transport sector.

Moreover, this study finds that women who engage in transport businesses often develop significant social capital, gaining influence and respect within their communities. The platform allows them to contribute to decision-making processes, advocate for community development, and address social issues such as poverty and unemployment rate. They serve as role models for younger women and girls in their communities. By demonstrating the possibilities for success in non-traditional careers, they encourage more young women to pursue education and professional opportunities, promoting a culture of ambition and resilience.

4.1. Challenges Faced by Women in Commercial Transportation Sector in Ibadan

Despite the growing participation of women in the commercial transport sector, they face several challenges that hinder their progress and full participation in this sector. These challenges are often tied to socio-cultural norms, structural inequalities, and gender biases prevalent in Nigeria and the transport industry. One of the most significant challenges women face in the transport sector is the deeply ingrained gender bias that views transport as a male-dominated field. Women are often perceived as less capable of managing the physical and operational demands of the transport sector, limiting their access to own their motorcycle or tricycle. Traditional gender roles in Nigeria place women in domestic spheres, while men are often seen as the primary breadwinners. This cultural expectation can discourage women from pursuing careers in transport, where long working hours, extensive travel, and interactions in predominantly male environments are common. These societal pressures can limit women's participation or lead to family disapproval.

Also, women entrepreneurs in the transport sector often face difficulties in accessing the financial resources needed to start or expand their businesses. Many financial institutions are reluctant to lend to women due to gendered perceptions of risk, and women may lack the collateral necessary to secure

loans. This financial barrier limits the ability of women to compete with male-owned transport businesses, such as owning a sales outlet for motorcycles, tricycles or spare parts. Women entrepreneurs in the sector frequently struggle to access loans and capital to grow their businesses. Financial institutions are often reluctant to provide funding to women in non-traditional industries, limiting their ability to expand their operations. While there are some government programmes aimed at supporting women's entrepreneurship, women in the commercial transport sector often find it challenging to access these resources. The absence of targeted financial support programmes or the challenges of accessing available funding further exacerbates the problem. All the women interviewed acknowledged that transportation is a man's business. Amarachi rehashed by noting that:

“... well, women on a normal basis do not get involved in transportation. ...it is a man's world. Women only get involved where they have no other option. When they get into it, it is only to fend for their families. It is basically to make ends meet. Most times, they use it as an avenue to generate income... raise money... or save up properly for their businesses.”

So also, riders face issues with poor infrastructure. The major infrastructural setback is insufficient bus stops. This makes it more difficult for a woman to grapple with. There are several issues riders face. A female rider noted that:

“We face a lot of challenges daily ... in situations where we have to park indiscriminately because of insufficient bus stops and are caught, we are expected to pay as high as ₦25,000. The role the agberos (touts) play is limiting but secondary. As the saying goes, the devil you know is better than the angels you don't know. We (transporters) already know their responsibilities toward the agberos.”

Another limiting factor is apparent in the physical aspect of the job. The central consensus of the participants is that transportation is hard and energy-tasking for a woman. From the answers given, the women are in this line of business because of a lack of options. Abidex corroborated the findings by saying that: “I pity the women in this line of business ... It is hard and they (women) need us for a lot of things like changing tyres and for the initial mechanical diagnosis of their tricycles.”

Poor regulatory frameworks significantly hinder the progress of female Keke riders. During interviews, all women riders expressed frustration with the Vehicle Inspection Officers (VIO) and the Oyo State Road Transport Management. Instead of providing guidance and support, these regulatory bodies have become exploitative, perpetuating harassment and extortion.

In the same vein, women in the sector especially those who work in public spaces like bus stations or as transport operators, often face harassment, both verbal and physical, from male colleagues, passengers, and even union leaders. The perception that women are less capable in a physically demanding field like transport persists, making it difficult for them to gain equal opportunities and respect. This creates an unsafe working environment, discouraging women from continuing or advancing in their careers. They further face higher risks of harassment, both verbal and physical, in public spaces such as bus stops, garages, and on the road. The lack of formal reporting mechanisms and legal protections exacerbates this issue. Many women in the sector do not have access to formal channels for reporting harassment or abuse. The fear of retaliation or further victimization often prevents women from speaking out, which allows such behaviours to persist in the work space. This lack of protection mechanisms severely limits the confidence and participation of women in the sector.

Similarly, the nature of the transport industry often involves long, irregular hours, which can be difficult for women in balancing their professional responsibilities with their domestic roles especially those with family responsibilities. The demands of the commercial transport sector, involves long working hours and irregular schedules, make it difficult for women to maintain work-life balance. The lack of flexible working arrangements makes it harder for women to balance work with personal obligations, creating additional barriers to their advancement in the sector.

Women in the sector regularly face challenges in accessing training and professional development opportunities. Due to historical exclusion from technical fields, many women besides the knowledge of driving skills, lack the technical skills needed to manage commercial transport fleets, oversee logistics, or engage in transport engineering. This skills gap limits their ability to take on higher-level management roles or start businesses in sectors that require technical expertise.

The first major harassment identified by all the women is the issue with touts. These women acknowledged the fact that the touts regularly harass them physically and emotionally. Similarly, the Vehicle Inspection Officers (VIO) and the Oyo State Road Transport Management harass them on the roads.

Indiscriminate ticketing is another major issue female riders disseminated that ticketing officers also harass them. Aunty Ope and Mama Ade noted that "...the money we spend is too much. We pay about ₦2,000 a day. You know that in the past we collected just one ticket at about ₦100 a day. This is no longer the case. The ticketing officers of the Parking Management system also extort daily. Policemen also do not recognise women, they even send thugs to extort us."

All the participants of this study opined that the greatest challenge in the line of business is due to bad government policies which harm the economy. To this, all the participants protested that most of the money earned is usually diverted into buying fuel. All the female riders also revealed that the bad state of the economy plunged them into transportation. As earlier mentioned above by Mama Ade, "...transportation is not a woman's job ... women got into transportation as a way to help out in the home" and "As a result of the bad economy, the responsibilities in the home began to climb up and it became obvious that men could not sustain the home alone. Hence, the women came into transportation and we have been helping in sustaining the homes."

Women remain underrepresented in key leadership and decision-making positions in the transport industry. This lack of representation means that women have fewer role models, mentors, or advocates who can help them navigate the challenges of the sector. The absence of women in leadership also reduces the likelihood of gender-sensitive policies being implemented. Women in the transport sector often lack access to professional networks that can provide support, resources, and mentorship. Networking within male-dominated sectors can be difficult for women, who may be excluded from informal gatherings or professional associations where key decisions and opportunities are discussed.

While there are national policies promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, their implementation in the commercial transport sector is relatively not pronounced. This is because many transport management structures do not have specific provisions to support women's participation, such as anti-harassment policies, even where gender-sensitive policies exist, enforcement remains a significant issue. Corruption, lack of political will, and weak institutional frameworks often undermine the effectiveness of policies aimed at improving conditions for women in the commercial transport sector. As a result, the impact of these policies is not felt.

Government policies and transport unions significantly impact women's decision to join the transportation sector. A notable example is the administration of Senator Abiola Ajimobi, the erstwhile governor of Oyo state. During his tenure, Ajimobi's initiatives, such as providing vehicles and soft loans, led to a substantial increase in women participating in the transport business. This was corroborated by Alhaji Ishola who stated that:

"Ajimobi during his tenure as the Executive Governor of Oyo state provided Kekes (tricycles). He gave a lot of "Kekes" to women. It was Ajimobi's policies that helped and eased transportation stress in Oyo State. Transportation got cheaper hence, making it faster and less expensive to transport goods and services. For instance, while it may cost as much as ₦40,000 to charter a Caster truck from here (Mokola roundabout) to Ijokodo, it will not cost more than ₦3,000 for the same trip with a Keke."

So also, as revealed in the field study, "... the current economic situation in Nigeria makes it difficult for most women to break even ... a VIO policy helped a lot of women to break even in 2023." According to Amarachi: "I am aware that the VIO in 2023 made a policy not to stop women. But for touts, there is no disturbance for women. Policemen hardly disturb, but the police women, do not care about gender."

Women in the commercial transport sector often face difficulties balancing their professional responsibilities with their family roles. In many Nigerian households, women are expected to manage domestic duties, care for children, and maintain their professional commitments simultaneously. This can lead to burnout, reduced job satisfaction, and lower career progression for women in the sector.

5. Discussion

This study revealed that the involvement of women in the commercial transport provides steady cash flow or earnings which are regarded as direct income or family financial support which represent the economic significance of employment, and income accumulation. Feminist economics theory critiques traditional economic systems for playing down women's contributions to labour markets, especially those in the informal sectors. It encourages women's participation in economic activities as being important to the societal development. The framework provides a lens for examining women's contributions to the transportation sector in Ibadan and their socio-economic relevance. Accordingly, women commercial riders play a considerable role in poverty alleviation.

"... *ise ni oogun ise* (Nimota explained that work is an antidote to poverty in life ...)" thus, empowering a woman, means delivering a nation from starvation while other challenges become insignificant.

Our interviewees reiterate that a good number of women that joined the sector did so, to cushion the effects of financial demands of the family, supplement the household source of income as well as to alleviate poverty in the home front. This is however, expedient where some women formerly depended on unstable petty vocation or unskilled labour with limited financial gains. Raliat stated that

"...engaging in petty trade could be very frustrating and not adequately rewarded. For instance, I was formerly hawking biscuit and sweet. I made profit that could not sustained me, let alone, my children. I believe that I work to give my children the best but my best was nothing because the profit on what I was selling was very insignificant to our daily needs and supply. Not until I met an old female friend that introduced and encouraged me to riding Keke, that I had financial breakthrough. Presently, my daily delivery to the owner of the Keke is ₦2,500 while on the average I make around ₦15,000. Having deducted the money for delivery, fueling, contribution/savings, I go home with between ₦4,000 to ₦5,000 daily. This had really helped me to contribute to a large extent to my family finance while earning respect in my neighbourhood."

In the same vein, our study shows that some women had stepped-up to the level of being owners of one or more Keke or Okada. Empirical evidence revealed that for those of them that are operating at this level, have higher prospective for savings buildup as well as reinvestment of their income or accrued profit. This could be made possible through the payment of their children's school fees which is a lifelong investment to produce a better generation of entrepreneurs and expansion of family business empire and accumulation of additional units of Keke or Okada that could be leased out daily to generate passive income. Kikelomo noted that

"I have been riding Keke close to two years now. Having observed the owner of the Keke I ride as she controls about 5 Keke, I have made up my mind to work assiduously towards buying my own. Though the current market price for one Keke is ₦2,300,000.00, my prayer is that by the time I'm three years in this business, I would have gathered enough money to purchase my own. And, not only that, thereafter, I intend to grow the business to the level of leasing to others."

Here, GAD theory (Moser, 1993; Miller & Razavi, 1995) is relevant to the study as it explains how women were able to enter and maintain their relevance in a male-dominated sector. Despite marginalisation, women have shifted from passive to economic actors in the sector. As such, where some

of these women have the idea and the vision seems unattainable, they think outside the box to raise money. Thus, the SLF (Chambers & Conway, 1992; Scoones, 1998) comes into play here. As such, commercial transportation is conceptualised as a livelihood strategy where women's socio-economic outcomes depend on access to financial, human, physical, natural and social capital. Olatooni explained that"

"... a good number of us run to many places to seek financial support. For instance, we seek financial help or soft loans from the cooperative society, informal loans (corporate or individual), family capital among others...this becomes necessary in a situation where we could not always find it easy to gain access to formal credit, like Commercial Banks, Microfinance institutions."

Women's participation in the sector further engenders local multiplier effects. Yemisi noted that:

"...women's involvement in the sector is a means of job creation. For instance, the more we have Keke and Okada on the road, the number of the mechanic would continue to be on the increase, same with hiring casual assistants, creation of maintenance workshops and the need to provide for supporting mechanisms around the terminals."

Studies indicate that this group of women support entire households as well as extended relatives.

This work emphasises that family welfare is highly significant to socio-economic impact of women in commercial transport. As this forms the basis of their search for *greener pasture*. Our research shows that when women generate income, and they able to retain their earnings, they tend to invest it in their children's school fees and other basic needs in the family. Yewande explained that:

"... those of us that are engage in transport business believe so much in using the money we earn to train our children. We cherish education. We are of the opinion that our children must not suffer the way we did, hence all we do is to provide enabling platform for them to fulfil their destiny, especially, their education ... we further channel the expenditure of our resources on family health maintenance and better food security ... but education takes the highest priority."

Women's participation in transport enterprise can be time-consuming and energy sapping. At times, combining the dual roles can be challenging and highly demanding. According to Kikelomo:

"... the total family welfare effect relies to a large extent on the complementary arrangements of adequately navigating the delicate balance between the intensity of working hours and the need to combine it with the care of the home front."

Furthermore, the capability approach (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2000) is visible in this study as it shows how transport work gives women physical mobility and a symbolic growth and development of social freedom and choices. To own or have the knowledge of riding Keke or Okada especially on a commercial note expands women's self-sufficiency which some of them equate with peculiar empowerment and enhanced social status recognition. Adufe stated that"

"... before now, on my street, some people look down on me as irresponsible woman because I don't have a job. But immediately I started riding Keke, I gained recognition and respect in my community. There was this strange look of seeing beyond a woman in me for handling the job naturally ascribed to men."

Interestingly, while some communities respect women that are entrepreneurial in nature, some frown at women in commercial transport sector for breaching gender standards. Our study reveals mixed responses. That is, to say, early entrants faced stigmatisation/discrimination and, often, resistance from male counterparts. Social capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986; Putnam, 2000) is relevant to this study as the theory is situated among other factors such as protection from harassment and collective bargaining power while helping to explain variations in women's outcomes despite similar participation levels. Nevertheless, passengers' acceptance of the realities over time have improved.

Similarly, there are structural and institutional factors that shape socio-economic significance of women in commercial transport sector. This includes limited access to formal credit facility especially newcomers in the transport business. As such, majority of them rely on rotating savings, family funds, microcredit or soft-loans, among others while discrimination and lack of collateral in formal lending settings inhibit women's access to funds.

In addition, the study further revealed that there are many challenges faced by women in commercial transport sector. This includes gendered risks such as verbal abuse, sexual harassment and targeted violence. A prominent one is the long hours and periods spent on the road. Often, these are unpredictable due to bad Nigerian roads. All these weaken the socio-economic significance of participation unless alleviated.

In summary, the framework is highly significant in understanding the actual situations of women in commercial transport in Ibadan during our period. For instance, GAD theory emphasises how women intensify efforts to ensure they become relevant and importantly fit and contribute meaningfully to the economic development of the society in spite all forms of challenges they encounter in the vocation. While their contributions depend on access to financial, human, physical, natural and social capital, the capability approach shows how transport work provides women with social freedom and choices for physical mobility and a symbolic societal growth and development.

6. Conclusion

During our period, women's participation in Ibadan's commercial transport has developed from supporting roles to evident participation of mere riders to owners particularly with the daily increase in number of motorcycles and tricycles as means of easily accessible urban transportation. This involvement provides quantifiable socio-economic achievements such as improved financial wellbeing of the family, steady income, asset creation and increased smooth mobility while it faced with the challenges of male-dominated regulatory practices, inadequate financial resources, safety risks, among others. To achieve the desired socio-economic significance of women's participation, safety, finance, skills training and institutional reform must be all-encompassing in the policy intervention while researchers should adopt gender-disaggregated, mixed-methods and longitudinal approaches to fill data gaps in future study.

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