

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: Brunel University London		
Unit of Assessment: 22 Anthropology and Development Studies		
Title of case study: Commercial use of research on motorcycle taxis in Kigali, Rwanda		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2012 - 2015		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): W. Rollason	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Senior Lecturer in Anthropology	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 07/2010 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014 - 2017		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		

1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

Dr Rollason's research has had significant impact on the design of SafeMotos, an 'Uber for motorcycle taxis' in Kigali, Rwanda. In 2015, the founders used Dr Rollason's fieldwork on motorcycle taxi drivers in the country to design the company and its operational structures. The operations of the company have resulted in economic and societal benefits for motorcyclists and passengers in Rwanda. As of 2019, 400 riders earn 100% more, which has resulted in improvements to the livelihoods of over 1,800 people. SafeMotos enhanced safety measures decreased the number of road accidents, which are the second biggest cause of death in Rwanda, and have since benefitted 300,000 passengers. In 2019, the company expanded into the Democratic Republic of Congo following the successful model in Rwanda.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

Between 2012 and 2013, and again in 2015, Dr Rollason (then, Lecturer) undertook ethnographic fieldwork in Kigali, Rwanda investigating the lives and livelihoods of motorcycle taxi drivers in the city. At the time, approximately 10,500 motorcycle taxi drivers were formally registered in the city, which has a population of just over 1,000,000 people. These taxis are an important part of the city's infrastructure, being the second most widely used form of public transport, as well as a direct and indirect source of livelihood for many people.

Dr Rollason's project involved investigating details of motorcyclists' business (including the ownership of the motorcycles, their costs, working practices and risks) as well as details of the regulation of the sector in practice and its relation to local politics, especially in terms of motorcyclists' co-operative and syndicate organisations. Dr Rollason's findings are novel. Motorcycle taxis are a recent development in Rwanda and across the region, dating to the mid-1990s. While motorcycle taxis had previously been studied elsewhere in Africa and on other continents, at the time of Dr Rollason's research, little was known about their business in East Africa, and nothing about the sector in Rwanda.

This research produced the following key findings and results, all of which were new to social science:

- *Details of motorcyclists' life histories and households.* Motorcyclists are generally young men, with primary education only. Many are migrants. Such young, uneducated men are

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typically vulnerable in urban African contexts, including in Rwanda. Motorcyclists, however, are not usually poor, and often support households with 4 or more members.

- *New knowledge of motorcyclists' livelihoods and businesses.* Motorcyclists make good incomes by local standards, but their margins are narrow, and they report considerable costs in relation to taxes and other charges and the maintenance of their machines. As a result, although motorcycle taxis are often seen as risky, riders themselves are risk-averse, preferring to carry passengers they know in familiar areas of the city.
- *A novel understanding of the patterns of motorcycle ownership in relation to patronage of riders by small-scale entrepreneurs.* Most motorcyclists do not own their own machines but rent or purchase them on credit from small business people who make the initial investments. These partnerships are fundamental to motorcyclists' livelihoods.
- *A new understanding of the operation of motorcyclists' co-operative and syndicate organisations and their relation to riders' livelihoods.* Membership of such organisations is, in practice, compulsory for motorcyclists to work legally in Rwanda. While these organisations claim to support motorcyclists and provide development support, in practice they function mainly to extract fees and rents from riders, who are very aware that they do not benefit from membership.
- *New knowledge about motorcyclists' relation to city authorities and their understanding of and engagement with local development initiatives.* Motorcyclists generally regard city authorities as hostile to their business. Along with risks of crime and mechanical breakdown, riders regarded encounters with the police and security personnel from their co-operative organisations as the principle risk to their livelihoods, threatening their financial security with the need to pay bribes and fines.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

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- Ref 1.** Rollason, W. (2019). *Motorbike People Power and Politics on Rwandan Streets*. Lanham: Lexington. ISBN: [978-1-4985-7681-9](https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2017.1287235)
- Ref 2.** Rollason, W. (2018a). 'The Mistakes That Make People: Reconceptualizing Power and Resistance in Rwanda,' *Social Analysis* 62(1), 96–115. <https://doi.org/10.3167/sa.2018.620107>
- Ref 3.** Rollason, W. (2018b). 'Life at a Tangent to Law,' *Journal of Legal Anthropology* 2(1), 26–48. <https://doi.org/10.3167/jla.2018.020103>
- Ref 4.** Rollason, W. (2017a). "Buying a path': rethinking resistance in Rwanda.' *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 11(1), 46–63. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2017.1287235>
- Ref 5.** Rollason, W. (2017b). 'Youth, presence and agency: the case of Kigali's motari,' *Journal of Youth Studies* 20(10), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2017.1324134>
- Ref 6.** Rollason, W. (2013a). 'Performance, poverty and urban development: Kigali's motari and the spectacle city,' *Afrika Focus*, 26(2), 9–29. <https://doi.org/10.21825/af.v26i2.4908>
- Ref 7.** Rollason, W. (2013b). 'Youth development success amongst motorcycle taxi drivers in Kigali' (Preliminary report of research carried out under MINEDUC permit No MINEDUC/S&T/0074/2012, in affiliation with the National University of Rwanda). Retrieved 25/02/19 from: https://www.brunel.ac.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0018/241335/Report.pdf

Impact case study (REF3)**4. Details of the impact** (indicative maximum 750 words)

In September 2012, Dr Rollason was invited to present a report on his research (Ref. 5) to Kigali City Council. The Vice Mayor for Children, Youth and Development and heads of motorcyclists' co-operatives were in attendance. This presentation was reported in the Rwandan media, notably on the popular news outlet igihe.com (E1) as well as the East African (E2). The article on igihe.com promoted considerable below-the-line debate. This report was made freely available on Brunel University London's web pages in 2013.

In early 2015, SafeMotos was founded as an "Uber for African motorcycle taxis that uses telematic data to measure real time driver safety" (E7, E8, E10). SafeMotos is a ride-hailing app for motorcycle taxis. It enables passengers to hail taxis, and also records data about riders' trips, harvesting GPS and gyroscopic data to analyse riders' road behaviour and provide them with a score indicating how safe their driving is. Its business model is to partner with motorcyclists who are working already, and to offer them a premium on fares paid through the app, which also takes a fee for the company.

Dr Rollason's research and expertise enabled him to advise the company founders about the social aspects of their business. In January 2015, Dr Rollason was approached by the CEO of SafeMotos for advice regarding the social organisation of the motorcycle taxi sector. The CEO and his team had read Dr Rollason's initial report (Ref. 5) and asked for further insights on the research's key findings. According to the CEO, the report had been instrumental in the initial stages of developing the SafeMotos concept and especially in helping the company work in a way that was appropriate to motorcyclists' working patterns and livelihoods (E3). Further discussion of the research between Dr Rollason and the SafeMotos team followed (E4). Following these discussions, the CEO invited Dr Rollason to work with the SafeMotos team on a piece of follow-up research in 2015 (E5). Dr Rollason returned to Rwanda in the summer of 2015 and conducted further research on the details of motorcyclists' business costs and the risks that they faced at work (Ref. 1). According to the CEO, this research was equally valuable in refining SafeMotos' design.

Dr Rollason's basic research directly influenced the development of the company at an early stage by shaping SafeMotos' ability to take account of the social systems by which motorcyclists access their machines. Dr Rollason's report (Ref. 5) is described by the CEO as the company's 'bible', which significantly expanded his and his partner's understanding of the operational structures of the sector in the initial design of the business and subsequently enabled them to design it in an effective and socially appropriate way (E4). For example, following Dr Rollason's research findings, the 2 founders decided to limit their operations to motorcyclists who owned their motorbikes outright, avoiding the risks associated with riders who rent or have bikes on credit. Dr Rollason's research further had a significant impact on SafeMotos' ability to understand better their 'customers, the motorcycle taxi drivers' which shaped the company's level of effectiveness in their further and ongoing development (E6).

As a direct result of Dr Rollason's research, the development of SafeMotos since 2015, can demonstrate a significant number of impacts at a global level. According to the company, "SafeMotos is working towards [several of] the United Nations Sustainable Development goals including building a safer taxi experience (SDG 11), developing a local technology industry (SDG 9), increasing taxi driver economic productivity through technology (SDG 8) and enabling females to become taxi drivers (SDG 5)" (10).

These impacts, to which Dr Rollason's research contributed, affect a number of constituencies:

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1. The riders who work for SafeMotos and their families. At the time of Dr Rollason's contact with SafeMotos, 40 drivers were working for the company (E7), which has expanded considerably since, now claiming 400 riders in Rwanda (E9), and is developing a business in DRC. SafeMotos riders claim that working with the company has led to their incomes increasing by up to 100% (E9). This allows riders, amongst other things, to improve their housing and invest in their children's education (E9). Dr Rollason's (Ref. 1, Ref. 4) research suggests that on average, 4.5 people are supported by each motorcyclist in Kigali; impact on SafeMoto's 400 riders will have resulted in such improvements to the livelihoods of approximately 1,800 people.
2. Passengers. Secondary impacts affect SafeMotos' over 300,000 passengers to date (enhanced safety). Safety is an important concern since road accidents are Africa's second biggest killer after HIV/AIDS (E7).
3. Company members and the wider economy have also benefitted (development of a local tech industry). The company has also been a successful business venture, with a gross revenue of USD1,100,000 in 2017, equivalent to GBP813,978 (12-2017) (9). At the time of Dr Rollason's research, SafeMotos had 3 members of staff, whereas today it employs 14 people in office roles (E10). It has been recognised with a number of awards for startup and tech companies (E10).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

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- E1** <http://iqihe.com/amakuru/u-rwanda/koperative-z-abamotari-ku-isonga-kubangamira-abanyamuryango>
- E2** 'Motards' face rough ride as police crack down with fines, confiscations, *The East African*, <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/rwanda/Lifestyle/Motards-face-rough-ride-as-police-crack-down-with-fines/1433242-1520544-vlqnc6z/index.html>
- E3** Corroborating email from SafeMotos, 25 January /2015
- E4** Corroborating email from SafeMotos, 3 February /2015
- E5** Corroborating letter from SafeMotos
- E6** Corroborating email from SafeMotos, 14 August 2015
- E7** SafeMotos helps Rwanda separate 'good drivers from the crazy ones', *The Guardian*, 28 December 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/dec/28/safemotos-rwanda-motorbike-taxis-road-safety>
- E8** SafeMotos Rwanda: The tech startup taking on Africa's second biggest killer, *Huckmag*, 10 March 2016, <https://www.huckmag.com/perspectives/reportage-2/safemotos-rwanda-tech-startup-taking-africas-second-biggest-killer/>
- E9** How Africa's Tech Generation Is Changing the Continent, *National Geographic*, December 2017, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2017/12/africa-technology-revolution/?beta=true>
- E10** <http://www.safemotos.com/>