

A letter to boda boda riders

By [Bernard Tabaire](#)

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Boda boda - "a type of motorcycle or bicycle with space for a passenger or for carrying goods, often used as a taxi" - is now a word in the English language. That is supposed to be a big deal because the Oxford English Dictionary, "[t]he definitive record of the English language", has said so.



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No matter.

Now that our word has gone truly international, let us start to behave.

Dear motorcycle boda-boda riders, please cruise on the roads with the awareness that obstacles exist. Many of you proceed at full speed straight ahead as if the road is all smooth, all clear, all the time. That is not the case.

You know very well that our roads are not short of potholes. This means that car ahead of you is likely to stop, slow down or swerve suddenly to dodge one of these great fixtures of Ugandan life. So stop riding very close to the car ahead.

Our roads may be potholed because no urban administrator in Uganda has a clue how to plug them, but they also do have intersections. My boda friends, know that the car ahead of you will likely turn and exit the current road. This means that when riding, especially on the edge of the road, don't hurtle down like a maniac. Watch the indicators of the car ahead.

“ *Most times I get the feeling that you boda-boda riders could do with a visit to the eye doctor.* ”

Control yourselves and slow down

Of course, intersections also mean other cars and bikes and bicycles are joining the road you are on. Control yourselves and slow down when approaching these spots.

And that weaving/bobbing in and out of traffic queues looking for the narrowest of spots between cars to squeeze your bodies and machines into is annoying.

Besides, what did helmets do to you? You seem to loathe them big time. At the very least, keep one clean one for your passengers. If you are happy cracking your skull, have some sympathy and empathy for your passenger.

You have been in the news lately for the wrong reasons...

Need I add that it helps you and your passengers when you stay clean. Smelling nice is a big bonus. Offer a clean and safe service, people!

Resisting attempts to streamline your business

One thing I don't quite get with you guys is why you resist attempts to streamline your business. I think you should not resist outright, but rather insist on negotiations so that any changes do not leave you worse off. You cannot be a law unto yourself, even if some of you think you are untouchable because you do intelligence work for the state.

We can agree that an orderly Kampala, for example, with roads fixed in such a way that allows for a smooth flow of vehicular traffic, including boda-bodas, benefits everyone. That is a fair deal. What is not is when you guys insist that you can keep right and park anywhere you want when the rest of us cannot do so.

Your mentality, incidentally, has proven extremely expensive for you guys and for the state. It is even suicidal.

“ *The figures are damning. Boda-boda accident victims make up about 80% of cases in Mulago's surgical ward.* ”

A study from a few years ago found that boda-boda "injuries consumed 62.5% of the budget allocation for the directorate of surgery, Mulago Hospital". The same study noted: "Road traffic crashes and in particular boda boda ones commonly affect the young adults in the 20 - 29 years age group. This is because the boda boda business is dominate[d] by youths as a means to a livelihood."

So you want to earn a living, which is noble and honourable. But why choose to do so at your life's expense?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bernard Tabaire is the co-founder and director of programmes at African Centre for Media Excellence in Kampala.

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