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POLICY BRIEF

An Integrated National Boda-Boda Registration and Information Management System and Digital Rider Identification

Target Audience: *The Ministry of Transport and Trade (State Department for Transport), the National Transport and Safety Authority (NTSA), county governments (county transport departments), and boda-boda associations and SACCOs.*

1.0 Background and Context

The boda-boda informal transport sector is a vital livelihood and mobility system in Kenya, yet weak rider registration, rider anonymity and limited traceability were identified in the study as leading institutional risk factors that enable offenders to hide within the legitimate rider population. Where registration is weak, motorcycle theft becomes harder to solve, fake riders are difficult to identify, and unregistered operators can commit crime outside recognised stages and routes.

The study established that registration is not a hypothetical remedy; it is the intervention that respondents and officials across counties already credit with measurable results. In Nyeri County, structured registration and direct communication between stage leadership and senior police officers were credited with an estimated seventy per cent improvement in sector security. In Mombasa, approximately seventy per cent of the public expressed confidence in registered riders due to improved regulation, registration systems and public awareness. In Busia, strong stage registration and rider identification through registration numbers were identified by key informants as among the most effective interventions in the county. This policy brief makes the case for a national, harmonised Boda-boda Registration and Information Management System (BRIMS) that reduces anonymity while protecting legitimate riders.

2.0 Methodology

The study adopted a mixed-methods comparative design across seven counties (Bomet, Busia, Kirinyaga, Machakos, Marsabit, Mombasa and Nyeri). Quantitative survey data were collected from 2,631 respondents. Qualitative data were obtained through Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions with riders, stage leaders, SACCO officials, county transport officers, NGAO officers, police officers, prosecutors, border and security officers, community leaders and CSO representatives. Archival records from police crime registers, law court case registers and a health facility in four counties provided independent documentary evidence, while GIS-based spatial analysis, including DBSCAN clustering, mapped crime-risk sites. Data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics, reliability testing (Cronbach's alpha), logistic regression and thematic analysis.

3.0 Key Findings

3.1 Weak registration is a leading institutional risk. Weak rider registration ranked among the major institutional risk factors alongside corruption and collusion, political interference, poor coordination, weak stage discipline, low reporting and weak prosecution. The institutional and contextual risk index had good reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.814), and a one-unit increase in institutional risk increased the odds of organised-crime exposure by approximately 53.6%. Institutions reduce organised criminality only when they actively address anonymity, weak registration, corruption and weak accountability.

3.2 Unregistered riders are disproportionately implicated in crime. Key informants across all seven counties repeatedly associated criminal misuse of motorcycles with operators who were not registered with any recognised stage or association. The Key Informant Interviews (KII) reinforced this: many riders who become involved in criminal activities are not formally registered with "SACCOs" or organised boda-boda stages. Fake registration and identity concealment were identified as indicators of more developed criminal organisation.

3.3 Registration is proven to work. In Nyeri, structured registration and direct communication between stage chairmen and senior police officers were credited with a seventy per cent improvement in sector security. In Mombasa, approximately seventy per cent of the public expressed confidence in registered riders. In Busia, strong stage registration and rider identification through registration numbers were identified as among the most effective interventions.

3.4 Motorcycle theft is the dominant crime, making riders major victims. Theft of motorcycles emerged as the dominant crime form across counties, confirming that riders are not only potential offenders or facilitators but also major victims of crime. Marsabit police statistics recorded twenty-six motorcycle theft cases in 2024 alone, and Machakos was strongly characterised by motorcycle theft.

3.5 Registration must be accessible and affordable. Many riders cannot afford formal training or licensing fees, particularly those who are unemployed or operating under financial pressure. Registration should not be used only as a control mechanism; it should also protect legitimate riders by helping recover stolen motorcycles, identify fake riders, reduce wrongful arrests and support access to insurance, credit, training and social protection.

4.0 Policy Recommendations

4.1 Formulate an Integrated National Boda-Boda Registration and Information Management System and Digital Rider Identification. The Ministry of Transport and Trade, in collaboration with NTSA and county governments, should establish a harmonised and verifiable boda-boda registration and management information system covering riders, motorcycles, owners, stages, routes and operating associations. The aim should be link rider identity, motorcycle registration, stage affiliation, licence status and contact information, to reduce anonymity across the sector.

4.2 Deploy digital verification tools. Digital verification tools should be made accessible to police, county enforcement officers, stage leaders and relevant transport regulators under clear data-protection safeguards, enabling rapid verification of riders and motorcycles at stages, stops and checkpoints.

4.3 Subsidise registration, licensing and training. Registration and licensing should be structured to be accessible and affordable. Subsidised rider training and registration, as recommended by the National Crime Research Centre (2018), can improve safety, accountability and professionalism while increasing compliance among economically vulnerable riders.

4.4 Use registration to protect riders. BRIMS should support the recovery and tracking of stolen motorcycles, the identification of fake riders, the reduction of wrongful arrests, and access to insurance, credit, training and social protection. In counties strongly characterised by motorcycle theft, such as Machakos and Marsabit, ownership verification and recovery tracking should be prioritised.

4.5 Differentiate commercial from private riders. The system should put in place mechanisms to differentiate commercial from private riders, in line with the national dialogue's call for proper registration and identification of all riders and the empowerment of riders through the formation of SACCOs.

5.0 Primary Implementation Pathway. The Ministry of Transport and Trade should lead the formulation of the national policy, with NTSA providing the technical regulatory framework and county governments providing registration infrastructure and stage-level data. Boda-boda associations and "SACCOs" should supply and verify membership data, while the National Police Service and county enforcement officers use the verification tools operationally.

6.0 Conclusion

An integrated national registration and information management system is the single most evidence-based intervention available to reduce boda-boda-related crime without criminalising the sector. The counties studied demonstrate that where registration is strong, security improves and public confidence grows; where it is weak, offenders hide within the legitimate rider population. The Ministry of Transport and Trade, NTSA and county governments are positioned to lead this transformation within three years, protecting riders, passengers, traders and communities while closing the anonymity gap that organised and opportunistic criminals exploit.

References

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