

The Multi-Apping Dilemma: Safety and Earnings among Tanzanian Platform Workers

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Key Messages

- Tanzanian youth are increasingly turning to the platform economy for flexible earning opportunities.
- This trend has the potential to reduce youth unemployment and the young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET) population.
- Low wages in the sector force workers to use multiple platforms, resulting in longer working hours and safety concerns.
- Ensuring safety for platform workers while maintaining their income is vital for the sector's goal of providing decent jobs by 2030.

Introduction

With the rise of digital platforms in Tanzania, more people have embraced platform work as a source of income, especially youth. Platform economy has the potential to reduce youth unemployment and underemployment rates, which consequently reduce the share of youth not in education, employment, or training- which was 17.5 percent (NBS, 2022). Ensuring this sector offers decent jobs is paramount considering that most of its workers depends on this sector for their livelihood. Platform work has brought about flexibility and autonomy of work. This also means that platform workers are not tied to any specific platform.

However, the need to earn a sustainable income has pushed some platform workers to work on multiple platforms, a trend known as 'multi-apping'. Multi-apping means that these workers work for extensive hours, thereby leading to safety concerns, and an increased risk of accidents due to fatigue, especially among drivers, posing a risk to the drivers, passengers, and other road users.

Working across multiple platforms (multi-apping) may reduce the time for rest breaks between tasks. Inadequate rest breaks can lead to decreased alertness, impacting a worker's ability to identify and respond to safety hazards. Also, multi-apping may require workers to use multiple apps

simultaneously, leading to distracted driving and reduced focus on the road.

The safety risks of prolonged working hours in Tanzania's platform economy are not thoroughly examined. This policy brief highlights the rise of multi-apping among Tanzanian platform workers and its impact on earnings and safety. It explores the trade-off between increased income prospects and safety risks. The brief offers stakeholders—including policymakers, platform operators, and worker associations—actionable insights to enhance gig workers' safety and income sustainability.

Methods

In collaboration with its partners, REPOA conducted a comprehensive study involving interviews with 152 platform workers to better understand their working conditions. This brief specifically examines two key aspects: first, the prevalence of multi-apping among platform workers and the underlying reasons driving this phenomenon, and second, it aims to assess the awareness level of platform workers regarding the implications of multi-apping on their work dynamics.

These platform workers interviewed encompass three sectors, with 11 in the ride-hailing industry, one in food delivery, and one specialising in technician services. The evaluation was based on the five Fairwork principles: fair pay, fair condition, fair contract, fair management, and fair representation. Fairwork developed the principles through multiple stakeholder workshops held at the International Labor Organisation to measure the fairness of working conditions for digital labour platforms. In Tanzania, the study included desk research, consultation with policymakers and interviews with platform workers and managers. In terms of socio-economic backgrounds of platform workers, males were more represented in the survey, comprising five percentage points above females. Over six out of ten respondents were youth, and more than half had completed secondary school education. One striking finding was that while more than half of the respondents were married, a staggering 72 percent of all respondents were the sole breadwinners for their families, emphasizing the critical importance of sustaining this sector for livelihoods.

Key Findings

First, the study revealed that multi-apping is practiced by nearly 95% of ride-hail platform workers in Tanzania. The study reviewed reasons for platform workers to work in multiple applications. The key informant interviews with the leaders of the Online Drivers' Association (TODA) and platform workers reveal three main reasons that attract platform workers to practice multi-apping in Tanzania:

- **Low pay and work-time limit**

Interviews revealed that most platform workers do not get the minimum living wage by working on one platform and some platform has set work limit. Hence, to maximize income, most drivers participate in multi-app to extend their working time, hence increasing their chances of securing work opportunities. This strategic approach empowers them to diversify their sources of income and enhances their prospects of consistently finding employment. Multi-apping is indispensable for these individuals navigating the ever evolving and fiercely competitive platform economy landscape. Adopting this approach gives

them access to a broader spectrum of potential customers and job opportunities. Ultimately, this contributes significantly to their financial stability and overall livelihoods. One platform worker reported that:

"The earnings from a single platform don't suffice to meet my needs. To increase my income, I am required to work extended hours, around 15 to 18, especially on weekends when customers tend to stay out late. However, my primary platform imposes a 12-hour working limit, necessitating my involvement in a second platform to fill in the additional hours to be able to earn decent income". (Platform driver 1)

- **Opaque Rating and Review Management**

Many drivers strategically juggle multiple apps to safeguard their reputation. When encountering a low rating or unfavorable feedback on one platform, they pivot to others, ensuring their overall image remains untarnished. Also, workers are sometimes deactivated or suspended due to things that are not entirely their fault, motivates them to work on a different app. This adaptive approach helps drivers sustain income and underscores the importance of robust feedback systems that comprehensively view a worker's performance across various platforms, promoting accountability and fair evaluations. platform workers lament that sometimes a misunderstanding with one customer can jeopardise their ratings, which is more likely to affect income. As explained by two online drivers:

"I initially received low ratings when I began working on platform A. However, with a few months of experience, I started earning better ratings and reviews from customers. Despite this improvement, my earlier reviews continued to negatively impact my current ratings. After nearly a year on this platform, I joined a second one, where I have managed to maintain a strong reputation with an average rating of 4.8 out of 5." (Platform driver 2)

"I encountered a misunderstanding with an inebriated customer who ended up vomiting in my car. I requested additional payment for cleaning, which, after a lengthy discussion, the customer agreed to."

However, the customer later reported me to the platform for wrongful accusation, leading to my immediate deactivation from platform A. I promptly switched to using my backup platform. It took around two days before I was reactivated on platform A. Had I not been using multiple platforms; my income would have been disrupted for two days." (Platform driver 3)

- **Diversification**

Relying on a single platform can be risky. Drivers may experience fluctuations in demand, and lower earnings during slow periods for various reasons. Using multiple apps spreads the risk and provides a safety net if one platform becomes less profitable or accessible. Also, different platforms may offer varying types of work or cater to distinct customer demographics. Drivers can use multiple apps to explore and find opportunities that align with their preferences, skills, and schedules. One platform worker said:

"I prefer engaging with local platforms since they charge a lower commission of precisely 15%, as compared to popular international platforms, which charge around 20%-25% commission. However, a challenge arises as these international platforms have a much larger customer base compared to local ones. This situation compels me to use multiple apps (multi-apping) to optimise my working hours and earnings. I favour taking trips from the local platform since they yield higher earnings, but I typically secure only two to three of these daily. Most of my trips, around five to eight per day, come from international platforms." (Platform driver 3)

Second, the findings reveal that many gig workers are somewhat conscious of the safety and health risks of extending working hours through multi-apping. Several drivers reported facing physical and emotional challenges due to long working hours. Some noted receiving lower customer ratings during extended shifts, while a few experienced accidents due to drowsiness, especially on late-night trips. These sentiments were succinctly echoed by a representative from an online driver association, who remarked:

"Most gig drivers understand the safety and health concerns tied to working long hours. However, in a major city, this is often the only way to earn a decent income, especially for those who are the sole breadwinners for their families. I believe nobody would choose to work these long hours unless it substantially impacted their earnings." A representative from TODA (Tanzania Online Drivers Association)

Conclusion and recommendations

The rise of the platform economy in Tanzania presents both new opportunities and challenges. While platform workers try to enhance their income, they tend to extend working hours, posing safety concerns to drivers, customers, and road users. Addressing the safety concerns without affecting platform workers' income requires a holistic approach involving government regulation, platform design, education, and collaboration between stakeholders. To enhance the safety and well-being of its platform workforce while fostering a sustainable and responsible platform economy, this brief puts forward the following recommendations:

Given the technological advancements in the country, the investments made in the ICT sector, and the potential of the platform economy to provide employment to the populace, it is crucial to adopt urgent measures to ensure the sustainable growth of the platform Economy in Tanzania. Three action points can serve to enhance the safety and income of platform workers in Tanzania:

- **Compensation and Benefits**
 - Advocate for better per-hour earnings to deter extended hours and multi-apping.
 - Consider co-funded benefits such as health insurance for platform workers.
- **Collaboration, Safety Standards, and Working Hours:**
 - Develop a unified tracking system to monitor worker hours across multiple apps in Tanzania and establish a framework for data

sharing between government and platforms to address safety concerns effectively.

- Collaborate with platforms, regulators, gig-worker unions, and non-profits to co-create worker-centric solutions.
- **Awareness, Training, and Platform Redesign:**

- Initiate programmes highlighting risks of overwork and multitasking, emphasizing time management and self-care. Refine platform designs to prioritize safety, ensuring mandatory rest breaks, task limits, and anonymous safety reporting mechanisms.

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