



***Experiences of Small Business
Leaders and Employees in Bbunga-
Ggaba Area, Uganda, During Covid-
19 Pandemic: Challenges and
Psychological Resilience***

Augustine Kalemeera
and First Year Students of St. Mbaaga
Seminary and Institute of Philosophy and
Theology, Ggaba, Uganda

October 2022



Introduction

- ❖ The Covid-19 pandemic has affected many people negatively.
- ❖ In a recent video message, Pope Francis called attention to the negative impact the pandemic and the wars were having on small and medium-sized businesses.
(<https://thepopevideo.org/august-for-small-businesses>).

What is a Small Business?

- ❖ According to the Uganda Investment Authority (UIA) website, small businesses comprise so-called “micro enterprises” and “small enterprises.”
- ❖ A micro enterprise employs up to four people, and has total assets not exceeding 10 million.
- ❖ On the other hand, a small enterprise, employs between 5 and 49 people, and has assets totaling between 10 million and 100 million Uganda shillings
- ❖ (See <https://www.ugandainvest.go.ug/sme>)



Small Businesses Drive Economy

- ❖ A study by the Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) has established that small businesses in Uganda have the potential to provide much-needed jobs to the large and rapidly growing labor force, which is expected to reach at least 36 million people by 2040 (IPA, 2012-2013).
- ❖ The problem is that even before the Covid-19 crisis, small businesses in Uganda faced a lot of constraints to growth, including limited access to finance, and high interest payments (National Small Business Survey of Uganda, March 2015).

Introduction (*Twaweza Uganda findings*)

- ❖ In Uganda, the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns had a significant effect on business survival.
- ❖ For example, *Twaweza, Uganda Chapter* did a mobile phone panel survey of 2900 respondents in early 2022, which showed:
 - 53% of pre-Covid-19 business owners reported their businesses were no longer operating (*Sauti za Wanainchi*, September 2022).



Introduction (Twaweza findings)

- In the Twaweza study, respondents who reported going out of business (n = 740) cited the main reason as lack of capital.
- Other reasons given for business closures included reduced demand and high cost of inputs.

Introduction (St. Mbaaga Seminary Year 1 Students study)

7

- ❖ In May 2022, the Year I students of Introduction to Sociocultural Anthropology of St. Mbaaga's seminary, Ggaba, carried out an ethnographic interview and observation of some small businesses in neighboring Ggaba and Bbunga townships (on northern shores of L. Victoria).



Purpose

- ❖ The study sought to explore the experiences and perspectives of small business leaders and employees during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown.

Informants + their Businesses + Student Researchers⁹

Group	Business	Informants	Student Researchers
I	Taxi Drivers	Ssebuufu Ronald (Chairperson)	Agaba, I. (Leader); Alberico, F.; Dominguez, C.P.; Opio, M.; Ouni D.; & Ssebuguzi, N.; & Wekesa, J.
II	Bodaboda Riders	6 Kiyembe Bodaboda Stage Riders (Bbunga) + 10 riders of a neighboring station	Kato, J.K. (leader); Amamaru, J.I.; Kigoonya, W. J.; Muwonge, J.; Pesic, J.; & Wanjala, M.
III	Market Vendors	Hadijah Nahukwago (Vendors' leader); 6 other female vendors + 2 male vendors.	Bukenya, B. (Leader); Kayiwa, F.; Luswata, J.M.; Muyunga, J. B.; Ssemaganda, J.; ssemuyaba, A.; & Ssengendo, J.
IV	Landing Site (Fishmongers)	15 fishmongers; 3 fishermen; 2 restaurant owners (Ggaba)	Magezi, N. (Leader); Balaba, P.; Ijuka, I.; Kato, S.; Kivumu, C.; & Ongom, C.
V	Landing Site	Mr. Alfonsi Wesonga (Fisherman)	Ssemmbombwe, H. (Leader); Ggayi, R. W.; Kaddu, C. L.; Lubega, L.; Muyimbwa, F.; & Ssebunya, J.
VI	Primary Teachers College (PTC)	Mary Kalula (College Principal)	Mucunguzi, J.M. (Leader); Kato, T.K.; Kimo, C.; Mbaziira, H. L.; Muhangi, & M.; Wafula, J.



Methodology

- ❖ Student researchers approached several small businesses in the area for interview and observation regarding Covid-19 pandemic experiences. Five businesses agreed to be part of the study as shown in the Table above.
- ❖ Each group of potential participants was provided with detailed information regarding the purpose and design of the study before they gave permission to participate.



Methodology (continued)

- ❖ Each group of student interviewers were guided by a semi-structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was varied according to group (a limitation in the study)
- ❖ All interviews took place in the first week of May 2022.



Results

1. *How Much Was Your Business Affected by the Covid-19 Pandemic Lockdown?*

- ❖ All respondents reported that their businesses were negatively affected except for one fisherman at Ggaba who claimed that the first lockdown in March boosted his sales as people believed that eating fish would increase their immunity against the Covid-19 virus.



Results: Emotions

❖ Emotions

- (1) Anxiety and Panic: feelings reported by taxi drivers beginning from the time they were forced to stay home in the first lockdown
- (2) Anger:
 - (a) The student researchers were struck by how much their bodaboda (motorcycle riders) respondents were still bitter about their experiences especially the way they were treated by the enforcers of curfew during the lockdown



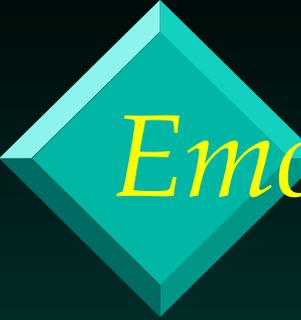
Results: Emotions

- (b) The female market vendors also reported bitter memories of having to spend cold nights in their stalls because of the curfew and the trauma this had on the family unit.
- (3) Grief: Loss and Regret
 - (a) taxi drivers reported being troubled by memories of loss of co-workers who succumbed to Covid-19 because, they believe, their immune systems were weakened by poor diet.



Results: Emotions: Grief

- ❖ (b) feelings of loss because of co-workers who left during Covid-19 reported by market vendors, bodaboda riders, taxi drivers, and PTC principal.
- ❖ (c) feelings of loss reported by bodaboda riders whose motorcycles were repossessed by creditors because of defaulting on their debts.
- ❖ (d) Loss of customers and students reported by market vendors and PTC principal respectively.



Emotions:

- (e) The taxi drivers reported regret that they had liquidated their Savings and Credit Cooperative Society (SACCO) investment and shared the cash at the beginning of the lockdown
- (f) Family breakups blamed on lockdown reported by bodabodas, and market vendors
- (g) Ongoing wrangles stemming from unhealthy competitions for the few passengers during the pandemic reported by bodaboda riders

Results: Stories of hope and resilience

❖ *Stories of Hope and Resilience:*

- e.g., Bodaboda riders reported that the pandemic opened their eyes to the need to invest their savings in a Savings and Credit Cooperative Society (SACCO), which they had earlier not seen as a priority.



Conclusions

- ❖ The study revealed lingering feelings of anger and anxiety as a consequence of losses and adverse events during the pandemic
- ❖ There were, however, a few positive lessons learned, e.g., realizing the need to save in a Sacco.



Significance and Limitations

- ❖ The study offered a glimpse into the pain and adversity experienced by small business workers during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown and after.
- ❖ This was an exploratory ethnographic interview spanning just two half-days with the businesses studied, so its findings may be more valuable for future research.
- ❖ Data was collected using a semi-structured questionnaire, which varied from group to group, so the results are not generalizable to the general population.



Lessons Learned

- ❖ Although some groups were at first reluctant to participate in the research, saying the students could have been spies, they later warmed up to being interviewed about their Covid-19 experiences.
- ❖ reluctant respondents can be convinced to participate in a study when the relevancy of a study is adequately explained, and when the usefulness of their participation is made clear.



Social Research May Be a Form of Caring

- ❖ Students did a self-evaluation, evaluation of fellow group members, and of the group as a whole:
 - Invariably all six groups reported the study helped open their eyes to what their “neighbors” were going through.



What Can be Done to Help?

- ❖ How can this research be used to bring about changes for these groups that accepted to be interviewed for this study?
 - psychoeducation in groups by our advanced students of counseling about common thoughts and feelings experienced following painful or disruptive events
 - skills training to teach those who have suffered losses or disruptive events healthy ways of coping with these reactions.



What Can be Done to Help?

- ❖ *Advocacy: our seminary and institute may need to work with business owners to reach out to the Federation of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises in Uganda (FSME) to see if they can help equip small-scale businesses in Bbunga and Ggaba with training in financial planning and other business skills.*