

The Role of Shoe Shinning Business as an Informal Employment and Poverty Alleviation in Kericho County, Kenya: A Case Study of Kericho Town Municipality

Dr. Flister Kurgat

fcchirchir@gmail.com

Abstract

Studies on individuals in the shoe-shine sector in Sub-Saharan Africa are scarce, and their future intentions in the industry are unknown. Kenya's informal economy is extensive and contributes significantly to job creation, income generation, poverty reduction, and economic growth. This article investigates the concerns and intents of persons who work in the shoe-shine business in Kericho's core business district. 70 people responded to a questionnaire by snowball sampling, while 15 others took part in in-depth interviews. Logistic regression and content analysis were used to examine the data. The lack of shades, extreme weather conditions, inability to meet daily necessities, and physical stress were the biggest worries. As a result of physical stress, diminishing pay, inability to combine the job with farming in their homelands, and the unstable nature of the job, some of them aim to quit the job in the future. Due to the difficulties involved, the study determined that the shoe-shine business may be defined as a stepping stone to more lucrative and stable occupations. The Kenyan government and other relevant state institutions must create an enabling business environment that allows for the integration of social responsibility into the operation of shoe shine enterprises, as well as build the capacities of people who have already created their own jobs in the informal sector, such as shoe-shiners, in order for them to sustain their businesses. They should be given capacity building, be encouraged to form groups to enable them acquire soft loans and be sensitized on the importance of having health insurance -National Health Insurance Fund (NHIF).

Keywords: *Shoe-shine Business, sustainability, informal employment.*

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I. Introduction

Studies on the shoe-shine business in Sub-Saharan Africa indicate that it began during the colonial era, when people with such skills were hired by African elites and civil servants who likely did not have house servants like expatriates to polish their shoes, nor did they have enough time or skills to polish their own shoes (Elkan, Ryan, and Mukui, 1982). The shoe-shine business has no defined definition; it is primarily carried out by young males who roam around or stay in one location to polish and/or repair shoes for a living. In Ghana, the shoe-shine industry is one of the informal sector enterprises that some young people engage in in most towns and cities, but it has received less attention in comparison to other informal sector companies like hairdressing, tailoring, mechanics, and others (Kwankye, Anarfi, Tagoe, and Castaldo, 2007; Owusu, Blankson, and Abane, 2011). The study uses the National Youth Policy's definition of young people or youth, which is defined as those aged 15 to 35 years (UNFPA, 2011; GSS, 2012). They make about a third of the population (33.8%), yet over half of them are unemployed (GSS, 2012).

The shoe-shine business is one of the informal sector enterprises that people engage in in Kenya's towns and cities, but it has received less research in comparison to other informal sector businesses such as hairdressing, tailoring, mechanics, and others (Kwankye, Anarfi, Tagoe, and Castaldo, 2007; Owusu, Blankson, and Abane, 2011). Kenya has a big and thriving informal economy that contributes significantly to job creation, income production, poverty alleviation, and economic progress (Republic of Kenya, 2013a). In 2019, the informal economy employed 83 percent of the workforce, up from 82.6 percent in 2018. In 2019, it also contributed for 90.7 percent of all new jobs, up from 90.2 percent in 2018. (Republic of Kenya, 2020). The contribution of the informal economy to national income climbed from 18.9% in 1999 to 33.8 percent in 2015. (KNBS, 2016). A sector that arose as a response to economic survival issues linked with rising urbanization and urban poverty is now being recognized as an essential, autonomous, and self-propelling development sector (Potts, 2007; Hope, 2012). Kenya Vision 2030 and Sessional Paper No.4 on Employment Policy and Strategy for Kenya both recognize the informal economy as a driver of economic growth, job creation, and poverty alleviation (Republic of Kenya, 2013a). Furthermore, the 2005 Sessional Paper No. 2 on the Development of

Micro and Small Enterprises for Wealth and Employment Creation for Poverty Reduction sees informal business growth and development as a stimulant for industrialization, economic progress, and national development (Republic of Kenya, 2005).

Shoe shining's persistence indicates that our economy has not developed as quickly as projected. More people would drive if they were wealthier, and more streets would be paved, lowering the amount of mud and dust, which are the two main causes of shoe shine. If you drive or are driven, you are unlikely to visit a shoe shiner (Iraki, 2019). This research focuses on the shoe-shiners who operate in Kericho town's streets. The shoe-shiners operates in the streets and strategic junctions in Central Business District (CBD) experience a lot of extreme weather conditions in the course of doing their business, since during wet seasons though this is good time for them to do their work , they are rained on. The experience cold mornings and wet afternoons and don't have proper shades. In the afternoons they experience heat which may be unbearable (UNICEF, 2000). in the study of children working in the streets. UNICEF found out that the shoe shiners income cannot sustain the live-hood and therefore most of the operators must multi-task, like transporting luggage, washing cars, selling newspapers, shoe-repair and some sell shoes. Another observation in Honkong (Feed Magazine, 2015) where most of the shoe-shiners operators are old men of 60 years and are not productive elsewhere due to health problems and are forced to look for a source of live-hood. The following research questions guided the study: What are the features of the shoe-shine operators' backgrounds? What are the issues that the shoe shiners are concerned about? What are their plans for the future of the business? what are challenges facing shoe-shiners?

II. Literature Review: Empirical Review

There is very little literature about the shoe-shine business in Sub-Saharan Africa. Elkan et al. (1982) in Nairobi, Kenya, published the only substantive paper on the shoe-shine business found in the literature review. The writers documented the following facts regarding Nairobi's shoe-shine business, among other things: That the shoe-shine business began in Nairobi, primarily on the key streets of Kenyatta Avenue, Moi Avenue, and Tom Mboya Street, and that the primary clientele were African elites and white-collar workers. To keep the shoe-shiners out of the downtown business districts where they were deemed a nuisance, the City Council Authorities used a variety of methods, including obligatory licensing and occasional police swoops at their locations (Elkan et al., 1982). According to the report, the shoe-shiners ranged in age from 17 to 34 years old and were largely from the Kikuyu ethnic group, which dominated the business through social networks built over time. The writers went on to say that the shoe-shine sector was diminishing due to an increase in the number of operators, resulting in low profits.

The shoe-shine industry is one of the most frequent informal businesses in Sub-Saharan Africa's cities and urban areas. The term "informal sector" or "economy" has several definitions, but this paper uses Khotkina's (2007) definition as any legal income-generating activity resulting in the production of goods and services by workers who are not part of the organized workforce, which may or may not include any legal violations. The informal economy employs the majority of young migrants in Sub-Saharan Africa, who are either employees or have formed their own jobs through various social networks. In Burkina Faso, for example, it has been observed that the oldest or seniors usually lead the young first-time migrants to Ouagadougou, where they introduce them to the shoe-shine business and later assist them in finding more permanent employment in small food kiosks, restaurants, and bars after they (new arrivals) have become familiar with the urban environment (Thorsen, 2009). This is in line with the reality that social networks make it easier to move to and work in cities (Kwankye et al., 2007; Tanle, 2010).

Apart from Sub-Saharan Africa, it has been reported that the shoe-shine business began in Hong Kong in the late 1800s, with white-collar workers in the financial sector as the primary clientele (Feed Magazine, 2015). The Hong Kong Urban Council has declined to provide licenses to shoe shiners since the early 1970s, citing the industry's decline. According to the survey, the majority of Hong Kong's shoe-shiners were 60 years old or older, and some were unable to work due to health issues, but they continued to serve the public because they needed to make ends meet. Finally, young individuals are hesitant to enter the shoe-shine company because of their poor monthly income (Feed Magazine, 2015). According to an ILO report on children working in Ethiopian streets, including shoe-shiners, the children face harsh weather in the course of their labor, including very cold mornings and evenings, as well as excruciating heat in the afternoons and during the dry season. Their main concerns, according to the survey, were a sense of insecurity stemming from not generating enough money and having dark futures due to a lack of or inadequate formal education (ILO, 2020). According to the survey, shoe-shiners, who were all males, combine their work with washing and checking cars on the sidewalks, whereas those who work near market areas also carry items in addition to shining shoes.

A shoe-shine boy, as they are known in Ghana, is a young male under the age of 30 who moves around or stays in one spot and polishes and/or mends shoes for a living. The profession is gender-based, particularly in Ghana, and this could be due to the societal expectation that males are more adventurous than ladies (Tanle, 2010). A shoe-shine kid typically carries a tool box, which is typically a wooden box with all of the essential

accoutrements, such as tins of polish in various colors and brushes for polishing shoes; threads, needles, glue, nails, a tiny hammer, and other instruments for mending shoes. They frequently travel from one location to another, occasionally tapping on the wooden box to attract people and advertise their trade/presence. Unless there are very compelling reasons, they normally work every day of the week. A normal day for a shoe-shine guy starts at 6:00 a.m. and ends about 6:00 p.m., depending on customer availability. Some do take a little break in the afternoon owing to exhaustion and/or the intensity of the blazing sun (Tanle, 2012). A number of studies in Ghana have shown the growth of youth firms or entrepreneurship in the informal economy, partly due to the ease with which one can start one's own business (Porter et al., 2011; Thilde et al., 2015). For example, studies show that some female migrants in Kumasi and Accra work as *kaya yei* (female head porters who carry all kinds of loads or goods for a fee) and street vending or petty trading, while their male counterparts work as technicians or mechanics, petty traders, or truck pushers (porters who transport goods on small carts) (Kwankye et al., 2007; Awumbila and Ardayfio-Schandorf, 2008; Tanle, 2010).

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In Kenya, shoe shining is always done by a middle-aged man who moves around stationed at one location and polishes and/or mends shoes for a living. In Kenya, this type of work is gender-specific. This may be due to African culture, in which men are considered to be more daring than women. A shoe-tool shiner's box is usually a wooden or tin box that contains all of the necessary equipment, such as tins of polish in various colors and a set of brushes for cleaning shoes; threads, needles, glue, nails, a tiny hammer, and other instruments for mending shoes. The shoe shiners labor all day, starting at 6 a.m. and ending after the crowd has finally ended. They are usually stationed in a strategic location or at a busy intersection (Tanle, 2018). According to Matelong, Serгон, Tuwei, and Cheptumo (2013), shoe shine businesses still have room to enhance their social responsibility practices in terms of fair pricing, equal treatment of all clients, and proper trash disposal, among other things.

III. Study Area

Kericho County is one of the Republic of Kenya's 47 counties. It's in the Great Rift Valley's South Rift, some 256 kilometers from Nairobi, Kenya's capital. The county is located between longitudes 35° 02' and 35° 40' East, and between the equator and latitude 0° 23' South, at an elevation of approximately 2002 meters above sea level. The county is bordered on the north by Uasin Gishu County, the north by Baringo County, the north by Nandi County, the north by Nakuru County, and the south by Bomet County. Nyamira and Homa Bay counties border it on the south west, and Kisumu County on the west. The county is divided into 6 sub-counties, 30 wards, 85 locations, and 209 sub locations and covers a total area of 2,479 square kilometers. Because it has robust national and county roadways connecting to the rest of the counties, the county is ideally positioned to benefit from diverse markets given by the bordering counties. Kericho County is cosmopolitan, with the Kipsigis sub-tribe of the Kalenjin tribal group making up the majority of the population. Other noteworthy tribes with close ties to the Kalenjins include the Kikuyus, Luos, Somalis, Indians, Luhyas, and Kisiiis. The Kipsigis believed in a divinity named Asis, who was the Supreme Being who created the heavens and earth. The majority of Kericho County citizens are Christians, while there is a sizable Muslims and Hindus presence.



Figure 1: Location of Kericho County

Source: <https://www.kericho.go.ke/location-position-and-size>

IV. Materials and Methods

This chapter looked at the methods and procedures used to answer the study's research questions and analyze the data.

Because the overall number of shoe-shiners in Kericho was unknown, a sample size could not be calculated. As a result, the snowball sampling method was used. After the first shoe-shiner was contacted and interviewed, he was asked to provide information on the whereabouts of his colleagues. This method was repeated until no more shoe-shiners remained unaccounted for in the study. A survey questionnaire was used to interview 70 people, while an in-depth interview guide was used to interview 15 others. The field assistants were well-educated graduates of one of Kenya's top institutions. Before the actual data collection, they had a day of training and pre-testing on the instruments at the Kericho Town Municipality. The quantitative data was entered into the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS), and the tape-recorded interviews were transcribed. The quantitative data was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Because the dependent variable for intentions to stay or quit was a binary outcome, the inferential statistics were calculated using the logit regression model. Content analysis was used to examine the qualitative data, which was based on common themes and direct quotes from respondents.

V. Results and Discussion

a) Respondents' Background Information

This part focuses on the first research topic, which is on the respondents' background characteristics.

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents (N = 60)

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	70	100
Female	0	0
Age		
15-25	5	7.2
26-35	15	21.4
36 and above	50	71.4
Marital status		
Single	30	42.8
Married	35	50
Separated	3	4.3
Divorced	2	2.9
Level of education		
None	10	14.3
Primary	40	57.1
Secondary	15	21.4
College & above	5	7.2
Ethnicity		
Kipsigis	40	57.1
Kikuyus	2	2.9
Luos	20	28.6
Kisiis	3	4.2
Luhyas	5	7.1
Monthly Income (Ksh.)		
<5,000	33	47.1
5,000-1,000	34	48.6
10,001-20,000	3	4.3
>20,000	0	0

Table 1 shows that, Out of the 70 shoe shining business surveyed, all of them (100%) were run by men, indicating that shoe polishing is largely a male-dominated business activity in Kenya, aged 36 years and above, and married, which is consistent with the findings of Elkan et al. (1982)'s study in Nairobi and Tanle's study in Ghana (2018). Because males are typically believed to be more adventurous than females, the shoe-shiners are all men (Tanle, 2012). More over three-quarters were primary and secondary school graduates, with the majority belonging to the Kipsigis ethnic group (57.1%) followed by Luos (28.6%). In their shoe polish enterprises, the majority of them (48.6%) made between 5,000 and 10,000 Shillings per month and less than 5,000 shillings per month.

b) Shoe-shiners' Job-related Concerns

The quantitative results of the second research question revealed four key issues expressed by the shoe-shiners (Table 2).

Table 2: Concerns of shoe-shine workers regarding their work

Job Concerns	N	Sub (%)	Total (%)
Economic factors	70		36.7
Job not lucrative	30	39.2	
Inability to meet daily needs	40	60.8	
Shade challenges	70		34.8
Shades are small in sizes	15	21.4	
Shades are unavailable/too expensive	55	78.6	
Health Issues	70		18.1
Ailments	33	47.2	
Job is stressful	37	52.8	
Social/family effects	70		10.4
My work has affected security at home	18	25.7	
My business has affected output in farming	35	50	
My business has affected household chores	17	24.3	

Economic factors (36.7%), shade issues (34.8%), health issues (18.1%), and effects on their families were among them (10.4%). Shades were found to be scarce or expensive (78.6%), difficulty to fulfill daily demands (60.8%), and the stressful nature of the job were the primary concerns of the interviewees. They also expressed dissatisfaction with how their work has impacted agricultural output (50.0%).

c) The Impact of Shoe Shine workers' Concerns on their Decisions to continue or Leave the Job

The study went on to look into whether the respondents' concerns had an impact on their decision to stay or leave the employment.

Table 3: Shoe-shiners Influence on their decision to leave the Job

Concerns	Odds ratio	Z	P value
Economic factors			
Job not lucrative	1.189	1.920	0.016*
Inability to meet daily needs	0.891	0.51	0.758
Accommodation challenges			
Shades are small in sizes	0.392	-0.091	0.619
Shades are unavailable/too expensive	1.210	0.09	0.892
Health Concerns			
Ailments	0.498	0.29	0.830
Job is stressful	8.45	1.87	0.038*
Social/family effects			
My work has affected security at home	0.982	0.31	0.923
My business has affected output in farming	5.465	2.79	0.000**
My business has affected household chores	0.536	-0.920	0.508

Concerns raised accounted for around 30% of the desire to resign, according to the estimated logit model (Table 3). Despite the fact that the factors utilized were unable to explain the majority of the regressand's variation, they were highly significant at 0.01 levels. The Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficient have a P

value of less than 0.05, indicating that the model is a credible predictor (Adongo, Anuga and Dayour, 2015). The Hosmer and Lemeshow Test score ($\chi^2 = 3.421$; $P = 0.2531$) verified this. The model was found to be significant in three of the nine variables. The largest predictor was found to be stress. Those who thought their employment was stressful were 8.45 times more likely to quit. The opportunities given by the job (odds = 1.189) were another factor that was more likely to affect respondents' intentions to stay or quit. This means that the less lucrative a job is, the more likely it is to be quit. These findings are in line with previous research (Masroor and Fakir, 2010). Respondents who also believed their absence had harmed their farm's output were 5.465 times more likely to quit.

d) Future Plans in the Shoe-Shine business

The final study question focuses on the business's future objectives for shoe-shine operators. The major reason for getting into the shoe-shine business is to make money. Given the precarious and tedious nature of the job, as reported by some shoe-shiners, some of them had planned to leave, citing reasons such as physical stress, job not being lucrative and stable, to engage in their chosen profession, aging, and neglect of their other responsibilities at their places of residence, while others said they would stay in the business because alternative jobs were limited. The following samples show the range of opinions expressed:

My plan is to save enough money to discontinue my job as a shoe shiner and relocate to Kipkelion, where I would do coffee farming and start a small retail shop. The reason for this is that I am also interested in farming and business (53 years, Married, Primary School).

In the future, I hope to employ young people in the shoe polishing business, as I plan to launch a campaign to transform the thinking of unemployed youth. Most people don't know how well they can work in another area unless they try it. I have experience in the hotel and tourism industries, but in order to survive in this new line of work, I have learned to be creative. (Peter, 47 years, Married, College)

As I previously stated, this is not the work for which I am trained; I am a driver, and as soon as I receive the funds necessary to obtain my driver's license, I will leave this position. I know that if I acquire my driver's license, I'll be able to get a car and earn more money than I do now (46 years, Married, Primary). For the time being, I have no plans to leave this shoe shining business because I do not have another work. So, for the time being, I'll continue to shine shoes (30 years, Single, Secondary School).

VI. Conclusion

This research investigates the concerns and goals of persons (mainly young people) who work in the shoe-shine business in Kericho's core business district. According to the findings, the shoe-shiners were generally primary school graduates who are unmarried, between the ages of 26 and 35, and belong to the Kipsigis ethnic group, which is Kericho County's largest ethnic group. The findings revealed that their main worries ranged from a lack of or inaccessibility to shades, a profession that was not lucrative, an inability to meet their daily necessities, physical stress, and neglecting other tasks at home. There is a statistically significant link between work non-profitability and plans to leave the shoe-shine company, implying that some of them intend to leave for more profitable occupations.

Because some of them invest a portion of their earnings in home farming, being away from their farms due to the shoe-shine business was one of their concerns, which had a strong association with their decision to quit the profession. Those who have made no other investments, on the other hand, want to stay in the industry since there are no other options. This means that the shoe-shine industry employs people who might otherwise be unemployed.

The shoe-shine business, can be concluded as a stepping stone to more steady and lucrative occupations. Some people got into the industry solely to get the money they needed to start a more profitable venture, but with time they have continued in the shoe shinning business.

VII. Recommendations

- i. The shoe-shine business provides work for some individuals in Kericho town who might otherwise be unemployed. The Kericho County administration, in partnership with the national government, should offer some basic business management and occupational health and safety training for shoe-shiners so that they can continue to operate while also protecting themselves from injury.
- ii. The shoe-shiners should collaborate to create shades that will allow them to run their errands with ease. The government and other relevant organizations should work to train young people who have already established their own enterprises in the informal sector, such as shoe shiners, in order to help them sustain them. There is need to keep young people employed in such informal employment in order to prevent them from relapsing into the rising unemployment rates.

- iii. Shoe shine businesses should be educated on public relations, customer retention, and how to register their business and obtain legal documents, as well as how to keep the environment clean and the government to provide an enabling business environment, as well as the county government to provide shade, water, and toilets, reduce harassment by the county *askaris*.
- iv. The shoe-shiners to be enlightened on the importance of having health insurance (NHIF) National Health Insurance Fund.
- v. They should be encouraged to join groups for them to access loans from micro and financial institution to construct shades , buy better tools and diversify their business.

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