Mobile Phones in the Transformation of the Informal Economy

Stories from market women in Kampala

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About this study

Research project studying the roles of mobile phone practices in empowering market women in Kampala

Situated empowerment: Mobile phones practices among market women in Kampala

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Abstract

In this article we depart from studies on empowerment and its intersections with the informal economy and market women in the Global South and promises of the mobile phone in so-called developing regions. Conducting an exploratory study among market women in Kampala, the aim is to examine what roles (if any) the mobile phone plays
Uganda
Kampala (1,5 million) 

*Hills of the Impala*
The Study

Facilitator and field assistants
The Study

Focus group discussions
The Study

Nakawa
The Study

Kalerwe
The Study

Owino
The 2014 Study
Informal Street Economies / Markets

Mobile phone (money / banking) visible in the streetscape
Informal Economy?

- Economic activities that are unregulated including employment relationships
- Responsible for the wellbeing of 2 billion people worldwide
- Cities in the global south
- State’s inability to provide social protection, job security
- State’s efforts to curb the growth of the informal economy

Important in

a) academic literature
b) policy papers, reports
c) international aid organization
State efforts to formalize the IE

Forced evictions ordered by city officials
Allocating fixed locations – such as markets
Replacing crudely built shacks with modern buildings
Taxes
Loan sharks
Owino market has been burned 4 times in 4 years
Communicating with customers, suppliers, landlords, officials, managing their private lives while trading), managing their saving circles

**Mobile money:**
Ease of transacting even with distant customers, ease of paying monthly rentals, taxes, transparent and accountable ➔ Street markets transactions moving away from the streets

**On the other hand ..**
Sim card registration (via mobile money registration: 49 out of 55 countries in Africa had mandatory SIM card registration, Uganda included ➔ Staggering amounts of personal data accumulated
National ID registration exercises further increase state’s control of citizens
Veer away from the dichotomies of formal/informal, consider nuances in regulation and state intervention in relation to economic activities

One the one-hand women have become financially included through the semi-informal street market economy and therefore also earn own money.

On the other hand these women are pushed into a market liberalism – underlining individual responsibility and individual solutions to poverty reduction earning a livelihood over structural ones

Concluding thoughts
Thank You for Listening!

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