



# The Killing Fields That are Kenyan Roads: Increasing Traffic Accidents as a Human Security Concern

## Executive Summary

More people die or are maimed because of road accidents in Kenya than as a result of terrorist incidents and other disasters combined. This brief highlights and presents road traffic accidents as a human security issue. Road users' errors, the condition of the road, environmental factors, and vehicle defects cause most accidents. The situation is made worse by the citizens' culture of disobedience of the law, and weak and/or apathetic traffic law enforcement measures. Although the effects of the accidents are felt at household and national levels, the problem of increasing road traffic accidents receives little government attention. Measures to control speed and drunken driving should be intensified. Public roads and highways should be constructed well, and maintained regularly. Pedestrians and other road users should be educated on road safety, and traffic rules offenders punished to reduce careless use of roads including walking on areas meant for vehicles, and selling wares on roads and road reserves.

## Background

Kenya joined the rest of the world in observing this year's World Day of Remembrance for

Road Traffic Victims, on November 19, 2017, in solidarity with victims of road traffic accidents and their families. Every year, about 1.3 million people lose their lives, and between 20 and 50 million people are injured in road traffic accidents, worldwide, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). Most of these occur in low and middle-income countries. There is about 32 per cent of the motor vehicles that exist globally in these countries, but about 90 per cent of the total fatalities occur in these countries. The number of deaths and disabilities in these countries has also increased since 1980s. The World Bank projects that annual road traffic fatalities will increase by 80 per cent in developing countries by the year 2020.

## Key Findings

In Kenya, more people die or are maimed as a result of such accidents than as a result of terrorist incidents and other disasters combined. National Transport and Safety Authority (NTSA) statistics of November 8, 2017 show that so far, 2,387 people have been killed, 3,261 have been seriously injured, and 3,676 have slightly injured on Kenyan roads this year.



**Poor state of roads:** badly designed (narrow roads, uneven, steep slopes, and sharp turns or curves) and neglected roads with potholes and without road signs increase the vulnerability of road users to crashes (Manyara, 2017). Many of the new roads (constructed in Kenya between 2002 and 2013) are already in disrepair. The poor state of some of these roads can be attributed to poor design and lack of regular maintenance. Well-designed and maintained roads are important for road safety.

**Speeding:** many drivers of different categories of vehicles – private cars, public service vehicles (PSVs), heavy trucks, and even motorbikes – tend to disobey, or are not aware of, the common rule of driving within the speed limit on various sections of the road. This increases the likelihood of accidents as it is difficult to control speeding cars in case of emergencies (Daniel, 2016).

**Overloading:** it is common to witness an overloaded *miraa* (khat) vehicles speeding on busy highways. Driven by the greed to make quick money, many PSVs (including motorcycles) also overload (passengers or goods). Overloading a vehicle can have a negative effect on steering, at the same time, gain too much speed on downgrades leading to accidents and damage

on the roads. These factors increase the chances of accidents (Government of the Republic of South Africa (GRSA), 1997).

**Careless driving and/or disregard for traffic laws:** either through sheer indiscipline, lack of knowledge, or carelessness, many drivers on Kenyan roads break traffic laws. Some drive road unworthy vehicles and of drive under the influence of intoxicating substances impairs judgement, and is a very common cause of accidents. Other accidents are attributed to non-observance of road markings and signs, which is related traffic rules and regulations.

**Corruption:** corrupt traffic police and other stakeholders in the transport department has been a major impediment to road safety in Kenya. Drivers bribe police officers to let them overload, drive road unworthy vehicles, over speed, and break other traffic rules. Learner drivers bribe to get a driving license before attaining the requisite competence. Others buy licenses from unscrupulous criminals who produce fake documents. Road contractors bribe government officials to approve poorly done roadworks. Thus, corruption has led to many avoidable accidents as observed by Transparency International [TI]-Kenya.

## Conclusion

Road traffic accidents impact the quality of life of the individual victims and their families negatively. They also affect the social lives of all levels of society including individual, family, community, and country. Road traffic accidents affect the capacity and ability of survivors to produce enough food and ensure their food security. This threatens food security at household level. The major threats to the health security of individuals include death, disability, and illness (pain and grief). Millions of individuals involved in road accidents or who have witnessed horrific accidents fear travelling in PSVs. To sum up, the increasing number of road traffic accidents in Kenya is threatening human security.

## Recommendations

The Kenyan government should do the following in order to reduce road traffic accidents, which negatively impact on human security:

1. Effectively perform the regulatory role by exercising full responsibility to enforce traffic rules and regulations; maintain all roads and highways; monitor traffic, the conduct of road users and driving schools; and supervise road and bridge construction works.
2. The government should put in place infrastructure which separates pedestrians from other traffic such as sidewalks, raised crosswalks, overpasses, underpasses, refuge islands and raised medians; lower vehicle speeds and improve roadway lighting.
3. The government should create pedestrian zones in city centres by restricting vehicular access.
4. Develop mass transit route design to regulate traffic and reduce road carnage related to the lack of such a system.

## Sources

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