

National policy on First Aid for road users in Africa

Carry First Aid Box Initiative: Prospects and challenges

By

David Oba, Ph.d

Charles Chude Ojugbana

Organisation: Prompt Assistance to Victims of Road Accidents-PATVORA –Nigeria

Situation

In the estimate of the World Health Organisation (WHO), Africa is facing the world's 2nd most severe Road safety crisis. In many countries of sub-Saharan Africa, Road Traffic Injuries (RTIs) are erasing decades of progress. World Bank forecasts that sub-Saharan Africa will experience at least 80% more road deaths in 2020 than in 2000, Consequent to these statements, organisations working for safer roads in Africa have a duty to promote innovative approaches that address preventable deaths and injuries. On record, the African Road Safety Conference Accra, Ghana, 2007 remains the most visible credible and concerted effort of African countries to develop unique strategies for reducing road traffic fatalities by half by 2015. The Conference which was co-organised by the World Health Organization and the UN Economic Commission for Africa with support from a number of agencies, notably the Swedish International Development Agency, the FIA Foundation for the Automobile and Society, the Sub-Saharan African Transport Policy Program, the World Bank, the United Kingdom's Department for International Development and the Global Road Safety Partnership produced a declaration for peculiarly addressing road safety crisis in the African Continent. The recommendations were aimed to advance the development of National action plans for road safety for countries in the region, in addition, utilise the benefits of safer roads to advance the millennium development goals. Unfortunately, almost two years after the Accra declaration, most of the decisions reached have remained unimplemented by all countries. Some countries that laid claims to improved road safety conditions in line with Accra declaration at the recent pre event of the UN Conference - African Make Roads Safe Seminar in Tanzania, July, 2009 ended up with a failed attempt as they could not buttress their claims with reliable and uncontroversial statistics.

Problem

With increasing road risks and dangers in the developing world, every minute of every day, officials of National road safety agencies in Africa are faced with the challenge of getting to the scene of a road crash as quickly and as safely as possible. The deliberations at African Road Safety Conference, Ghana, 2007 by meeting of experts to institute mandatory First Aid training to all drivers and First Aid Box mandatory in all cars in Africa were largely based on the following:-

- The inadequacy of rescue facilities by existing National Road Safety Agencies
- Credible research findings on African communities which showed that 50% of deaths on the spot of road crash are not caused by severity of the crash but due to minor injuries like airway blockage, breathing difficulties and circulation problems which could have been addressed by First Aid application.
- The fact that there is no room for complacency because precious time lost can mean the difference between life and death for a road crash victim waiting for help.

This important aspect of the Accra declaration on First Aid as contained in item 45 of trauma section has not been implemented by any country. Thus, in the face of increased motorisation and continued delayed response of emergency services at road crash scenes, without the implementation of a National First Aid policy, deaths on the spot of road crashes will continue to increase especially with non participation of bystanders in community rescue efforts especially as first callers to road crash scenes on most roads of Africa.

Objective

Reducing deaths on the spot of road crashes is the primary aim behind this study and it seeks to investigate the benefits and challenges of implementing a National First Aid policy as endorsed by the Accra declaration, review existing advocacy efforts, proposals for implementation and make necessary recommendations.

Approach

In the absence of a co-ordinated approach for the implementation of a National First Aid programme, this study relies on the overwhelming evidence on the efficacy of First Aid by experts including the deliberations that led to the Accra declaration that knowledge and application of First Aid will save lives and help minimise injuries when road crashes occur on African roads. It specifically focuses attention on an existing advocacy and campaign initiative by the PATVORA Organisation ‘Carry First Aid box’ – CarryFAB and its proposal for the implementation of a National First Aid policy through tri sector partnership.

Analysis

First Aid training of road users and box in cars is an innovation in public health management to mitigate damage in terms of fatalities and injuries especially on the roads of Africa. Yet, past studies confirm that because of lack of awareness, most drivers do not understand that First Aid is a quick, simple and cheap initiative that saves lives. The majority car owners do not have First Aid box in their cars; they have a preference for equipping their cars with i-pods, CDs, etc.

The CarryFAB initiative is a focused strategy to support the endorsement of African Road Safety Experts that First Aid training should be a fundamental priority for road users and First Aid box, a standard measure in cars. The initiative through local campaigns and development of a website www.carryfab.org offers a platform to foster expert advice, disseminate best practices, advance application on First Aid for road users. The initiative’s website stimulates actions for exerting political pressure on National Road Safety Agencies in Africa to honour the commitment made at the meeting of experts in Accra 2007. The CarryFAB campaign has worked with people at community levels by making them understand that there are steps which in their own interest they need to take to know how to minimise the impact of road crashes. In 12 months of the existence of CarryFAB initiative, it has successfully built capacity of road users on First Aid in some communities to respond rapidly to road crashes by training petrol station

attendants on select highways and drivers at commercial motor parks in Delta State, Nigeria through support and funding of the PATVORA Organisation. These pilot scheme yielded a reduction of road deaths on road crash spots by 64% within the said period. To scale up the training of road users for both free and commercial First Aid programmes on a National level, the CarryFAB initiative proposes a special casualty reduction programme based on a Tri-sector partnering model. The approach demonstrates how the private sector, civil society and government can work together to achieve maximum benefits on First Aid use for all the parties and road users. The scheme was initially presented and published by Safety 2004, a WHO organised Conference in Vienna, Austria. The model is on the implementation of a National First Aid policy through partnerships that does not require government funding but will enhance road safety especially on rescue operations at no cost to a large section of road users. The partnership recommends First Aid kit producers as private sector participants for the purpose of providing finance, project management and engineering skills; the formation of a National Intervention Agency on First Aid or use of lead National Road Safety Agency for providing strategic co-ordination and enforcement, while selected NGOs provides leadership to mobilise local community participation in the form of learning of First Aid skills through campaigns and awareness programmes. The scheme in recognition of the socio-economic deprivations and non insurance participation of many Africans will not only provide emergency post impact care for injured victims through availability of standardised First Aid kits but will offer limited free medical assistance to road users at the expense of the private sector participants. The project strategy entails a comprehensive partnership action plan that will require NGOs to be responsible for First Aid capacity building by recruiting, training, deploying and managing volunteers through professional structures. While, the Private sector will supply/service First Aid kits with limited medical assistance to encourage doctors to commence immediate treatment of crash victims, it will also fund NGO activities and establish appropriate and enabling fiscal frameworks which support volunteering like toll free phone facility, helpline centre, and tracing and messaging facilities to victim's families. Government's participation either through a National Intervention Agency on First Aid or lead National Road Safety Agency will include enforcement of First Aid policy, enhanced rescue operations and monitoring of road safety regulations. These road safety improvements by the government agency will be made possible through resources it will generate from the this scheme as the Private sector will offer 10% of the revenue earned from sale of First Aid boxes to the National Lead Road Safety Agency. Also, the scheme through issuance of First Aid proficiency certificate to licensed drivers provides the Government Agency with an additional option to generate resources for its short and long term needs. This complementary initiative on issuance of First Aid proficiency certificate gives priority to the rudiment of First Aid administration by ensuring that licensed drivers and applicants for drivers' license know how to behave in the event of a road crash and be familiar with the measures that can be taken to assist road crash victims. It is projected to be a major and permanent source of revenue for the lead road safety agency every five years being the recommended renewable period for First Aid certificates. Thus, addressing inadequate funding of National Road Safety Agencies, a major problem of road safety growth in Africa.

Conclusions

There is a wealth of medical evidence to suggest that a 'golden hour' exists for casualties after a road crash and First aid is a proven cost-effective, safe and simple way to save lives in an emergency. The CarryFAB initiative though at its preliminary stage is a first real bid to give impetus to the Accra declaration on emergency rescue operations. It offers a new paradigm for dealing with road safety in developing countries through enhanced community participation in rescue operations for crash victims on African roads especially given today's intolerable safety records all across African roads. The initiative identifies and disseminates good practices of First Aid at the community level by teaching road users what works in scene of rescue operations for road crash victims and it places a very real responsibility on the populace to be able to use effectively their skills. CarryFAB initiative promotes voluntary service and community responsibility as an important way in which communities can play a part in emergency preparedness and response. It also engages concrete partnership in the hope that knowledge shared on First Aid would be of direct benefit to road users on issues of crash prevention and minimising deaths and injuries that occur on the roads. The pilot scheme of the CarryFAB campaigns conducted in focused areas have recorded encouraging success as a quick impact project for road casualty reduction but this is considered largely insignificant on a National scale when compared to the magnitude of Road Traffic Injury problem in African countries. The need to scale up such an initiative becomes a necessity, thus the consideration for a National First Aid programme.

The CarryFAB proposal for National First Aid policy as described above, is a pioneer effort to address rescue operations for road users through Public Private Partnership using First Aid as a basis for collaboration. The scheme recognises that funding for road safety improvements should be shared with those who stand to gain from crash prevention measures especially vehicle owners provided that it is done through a programme that will attract little or no cost to public transport users who are mostly deprived.

The proposed National First Aid policy offers a wide network of strategies and services from which information can be procured for the execution of National First Aid programmes by interested countries. Specifically, the tri sector partnership approach employed by the scheme recognises that resource constraints of Lead Road Safety Agencies in Africa cannot permit them to independently implement effectively a National First Aid Policy as recommended by Accra declaration. The CarryFAB proposal provides an implementation strategy that does not require government funding and would not attract any cost to a large section of the population especially in communities in Africa where over 80% of the population don't own cars, yet would benefit from the free First Aid training and medical support as provided by the Private Sector participant and NGOs. The CarryFAB proposal when properly implemented is predicted to be the biggest lifesaver on the spot of road crashes by at least 50% as established by its pilot schemes.

Recommendations

The CarryFAB proposal is a measure with great potential to cut road deaths, minimise the severity of injuries and reduce over dependence of National road safety agencies on the lean resources of National governments in the African continent, thus significantly contributing to the goal of most African countries to halve the number of road traffic fatalities by 2015. Successful implementation of such a programme on National First Aid

in Africa will demonstrate the political will of governments to enter into a long-lasting commitment to addressing global road safety crisis. However, achieving success through CarryFAB's proposed innovative partnership requires accountability, transparency and commitment from all parties involved. This will not only guarantee the sustainability of the partnership but will encourage other well meaning individuals, NGOs, development partners and corporate citizens to join in this important issue of saving lives on the roads especially in proposed Decade of Action (2010-2020) on road safety by the United Nations and efforts of other organisations like the International Road Federation and World Health Organisation.