

ROAD SAFETY EDUCATION TO STAKEHOLDERS: ENFRTD'S INITIATIVE

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Road safety has become a global agenda since recent times as road traffic accidents have become a leading cause of death and injury among the top ten world challenges of mankind. Various global and national studies, including data of Global Road Safety Partnership (GRASP), have unequivocally attested that road crashes are immensely affecting the low and middle-income countries. Low and middle-income countries suffer disproportionately with 85% of the world's road deaths. Pedestrians often account for the largest number of road deaths, and predominantly the poor.

Likewise, Ethiopia is one of the highest in road accident records. The death rate per 10,000 vehicles is 136 of which over half of the killed are pedestrians. According to the data gathered from the traffic police in 2003, traffic accidents caused 1800 deaths and physical damages to 7000 people; thus increasing the number of persons with disabilities in an alarming rate. The majority of the death victims, about 51 per cent, were pedestrians and 31 per cent were students.

Currently, it is estimated that annually, there are about 15,000 vehicles' crashes. Though the death rate in proportion of the total population is the least when compared to many developing countries, when compared globally, the death rate per 10,000 cars makes it to be one of the leading groups of countries in registering high death rate because of traffic accidents. This appalling situation also portends critical trends of increased rate of accidents and consequences as the number of cars increases unless vigorous and rigorous preventive measures are taken.

The economic loss as the consequence of the traffic accidents is estimated to be about 0.8 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP), against the 2% GDP loss in some developed countries. In other words, it is estimated that the traffic accident, both the recorded and the unrecorded ones, makes a loss of 400-500 million Birr, equivalent to about 46.2 – 57.8 million US dollars. Such magnitude of accidents record in a low-density traffic area compared globally, demands a serious concern and preventive measures to avert the increasing danger.

Good roads are normally convenient for driving and contribute to road safety. Nonetheless, the frequent and increasing traffic accidents are being observed in this good-asphalted area. Driving at high speed by reckless drivers, absence or little traffic law enforcements, low awareness of both drivers and pedestrians, absence of speed control radar adversely contribute to the increasing traffic accidents.

The repercussion is more than what the figure reveals. The death of one Ethiopian breadwinner is a social and economic death of 5-6 people at household level and more in the Ethiopian context where mutual help is expanded in an extended family. On the other hand, the death of a young man or woman is a loss of a strong work force in the

economic sense. Road accidents taking the lives of animals, donkeys, horses, oxen, sheep, goats and the like is a major loss of livelihood to the rural people. Briefly, the figures could rather underestimate the social and economic repercussions. The effect is much agonizing and terrifying from a humanitarian, social and economic point of view.

Such a great loss of human and animal life and damages of property exacerbates the social and economic problems of the country. This is a horrendous problem, which a poor country can hardly tolerate or shoulder for long. Therefore, it is essential to embark on a colossal task of averting these unchecked and devastating problems of road accidents.

2.0 PROBLEM STATEMENT

One of the serious challenges the Ethiopian transport sector faces is road fatalities and injuries. Most road fatalities occur in the domain of the rural sector. Usually, high speed is observed in less traffic areas on highways and streets outside main cities where non-traffic jams contribute to high speed. Traffic regulations are less respected in the rural sector. On the other hand, pedestrians have little orientation about road uses. As a result, people and animals in the rural are victims of road accidents.

Moreover, in small towns and cities, the rural people who go to small towns and cities for marketing, cultural and social activities are encountered with traffic problems; and they are the most vulnerable ones in urban areas.

Despite the fact that the rural people are victims of road accidents, lack of statistical data collection in the rural sector, the magnitude of the problem is rather generally unknown and there lacks focus on the area in this regard.

3.0 CAUSES OF ROAD ACCIDENTS

The causes of the traffic accidents are many and varied ranging from reckless driving to absence of the necessary precautionary measures. Non-visibility during night time and in general, absence of signs on the road, non-use of transparent bands or reflectors, little or no awareness of the rural people on road safety, including ignorance of traffic rules and regulations are some of the major causes of the problems.

Various studies conducted in the country have revealed that drivers cause 81% of the injury accidents. Vehicles defect, pedestrians' error and roads defects account for 5%, 4% and 1% respectively. The 9% accident is due to unknown reasons.

Furthermore, the studies also show that professional employed drivers cause 88% of the fatal accidents. Special purpose vehicles and motorcycles drivers cause 8% of the fatal accidents. Automobile drivers, engaged in about 43% of the total number of vehicles in the country have good safety records, with only 4% of the fatal accidents.

Improper behaviors or low skill of drivers is said to be the underlining reason for the accidents. Non-respect of pedestrian priority, over speeding, overloading and in general, reckless driving are some of the attributes to problems of the drivers.

The other causes for the road accidents as indicated above are poor vehicle technical conditions, animals and carts using the highways, pedestrians' little concern to proper precautions, poor traffic law enforcements, poor emergency medical services and little safety considerations in roads development and the likes.

More succinctly, various studies indicate that the major causes of road accidents are the following:-

- Improper behavior and/or low skill of drivers;
- Poor vehicle technical conditions;
- Trekking animals and carts using the highways in some areas;
- Poor road conditions;
- Poorly designed roads;
- Pedestrians' negligence;
- Weak traffic law enforcement; etc.

Apparently, the above mentioned causes, which are, per se, direct ones, have root causes which are much deeper and complex. For instance, the improper causes of improper behavior of drivers could be as a result of particular gene variant which is uncontrollable, or influences by different factors like absence of job security, low salary, mistreatment, overload of work, and the likes which could be considered as indirect causes made by lack of sound labour management system, inconsiderate or maladministration, lack of an enabling environment with regard to policy and regulatory framework. In short, the causes of road accidents are direct and indirect which comprise internal and external factors ranging from self-imposed to external environmental influences.

4.0 THE WAY FORWARD

The challenge of reducing road accidents has multidimensional aspects. As clearly depicted above, the causes for traffic accidents are many and varied. Reckless driving because of different factors like high speed, low skill and knowledge both in driving and/or traffic regulations, pedestrians error in using traffic roads, weak traffic regulation enforcement and/or lack of appropriate policy and legal framework, vehicles default because of wear out of old age, poor technical design, incompatibility with the terrain or weather conditions and the likes are some of the major causes of road fatalities and injuries,

In other words, the development of a strategy, which addresses the various major causes of accident, is of paramount importance to prevent the escalating road accidents. The important aspects of the strategy shall focus on, among other things, education, awareness creation and public-private partnership.

5.0 INITIATIVES OF ENFRTD

Ethiopia stands to be one of the leading countries encountered with high rate of road accidents when compared with the other countries with regard to the rate of the low number of vehicles. Unless the necessary measures are taken in time, it is estimated that it will rank fourth from the list of the top killers of people,

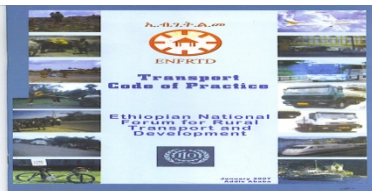
In recognition of this stark reality, the Ethiopian National Forum for Rural Transport and Development is seriously engaged in road safety activities. It is exerting every effort in promoting education and enhancing the awareness of the people on road safety through, including, workshops, dissemination of leaflets and distributing publications related to road safety. It has published two brochures on “Transport Code of Practice” and “Traffic Lessons for Children” in the Amharic and English languages, which dwell on the basic issues of road safety.

The overall objective of the activities is to avert the increasing trend of road accidents; ENFRTD has taken different initiatives towards appreciating the magnitude of the problem and to find strategies in the prevention of road accidents. In this respect, it has organized a series of workshops in small and big towns on road safety. Based on the outcomes of the workshops, it has produced two publications, viz., Transport Code of Practice and Traffic Lessons for Children.

6.0 PUBLICATIONS:

a) Transport Code of Practice

This publication was a result of road safety activities made in small towns, Mojjo and Zewai, where the users and victims of road accidents are mainly the rural people. The intermediate means of transport (IMTs), mainly horse and donkey carts are used and operated by the rural people.



The findings of the causes and nature of road fatalities and injuries have recognized the multi-disciplinary nature of the problem and its solution evolved to be a multidimensional approach that sought for co-ordinated activities, shared responsibilities and accountability. This idea culminated in having a code of practice on transport which addresses road safety issues, the need for public-private partnership, and adherence to moral and ethical practices by all stakeholders. More succinctly, the code of practice on transport underscores that transport, which has road safety as one major component, is a human rights issue. It emphasises the rights of people related to transport and health; and the need to respect the rights by all concerned bodies.

b) Traffic Lessons for Children

Awareness creation and sensitization of children is an important road map in the overall task of arresting the increasing road fatalities and injuries. Children are tomorrow's future of the world who will shoulder enormous responsibilities in different walks of life. They are the basis for the future.

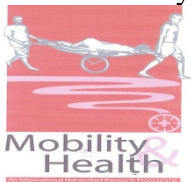


The basis and driving motors of the future, children, need to be taught and sharpened by inculcating in their minds the significance of safety as they are tomorrow's drivers, pedestrians, leaders, designers, policy makers, legislators, executives, manufacturers, owners or employees. Therefore, the introduction of traffic lessons to children is crucial as they step up on the ladder of social, economic and political responsibilities.

The booklet addresses issues like children's behaviour inside a vehicle, children as pedestrians, children as cyclists, children in crossing roads, children at play and "work", and, children at procession.

7.0 RESEARCH WORKS:

b. With the view to contributing to sensitization efforts relevant to road safety, two main research works have been conducted on Transport and Health and Rural Hubs, both commissioned by IFRTD.



8.0 PROJECT WORKS:

Road safety lessons are given along the Forum's two projects on the Prevention and Control of HIV/AIDS and STDs in two regions of the country

8.1 Workshops:

Different workshops are organized on road safety issues both in the capital and other towns of the country.

The focus of ENFRTD's activities is essentially intended to enhance the awareness of all stakeholders by trying to contribute by sharing its limited experiences which will lead all to embark on the road map towards the challenge to prevent road fatalities, injuries and adverse economic and social consequences.

9.0 RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

At national level, efforts are being exerted towards alleviating the problem of road accidents. Awareness programmes are conducted through various media by public and private organizations, associations and NGOs. An interim body, National Co-ordination Office for Road Safety, is established.

Yet, there is a lack of coordination in activities with the exception of few or limited endeavors. Uncoordinated activities usually lead to the wastage of time and resources. They remain mere records of major activities. Workshops or awareness raising functions shall be result-oriented and coordinated. It is, therefore, high time that activities in road safety should be coordinated in both resources and time usage.

It would be naivety to assume that meaningful contribution to the problem is made by acting alone and alone with the expectation of gaining credit for doing it alone. Obviously, development can happen if each works and the works are coordinated with others. It is a common occurrence that there are some who look for credit by doing alone and appear uncomfortable if others do the objective or mission of theirs. Saving life is not something that one should seek to march for credit. Rather, it is an obligation - moral and social obligation, a humanitarian mission one should and must do. Appreciating others for initiatives taken or actual work done and willingness and readiness to work together is instrumental in tackling national problems of road accidents. Above all, the discharge of duties and responsibilities with commitment, transparency and accountability is of utmost importance. This epitomizes a code of practice that needs to be observed by all stakeholders.

Briefly, road safety has a developmental and human rights dimension. Unless efforts are exerted by working together in a strategic approach, the result of uncoordinated or disorganized effort does not go beyond disillusion or self-contentment of sometimes-unclear consequences. Therefore, the road safety issue is an important aspect, which demands, *inter alia*, a comprehensive and strategic approach, which could involve stakeholders, viz., government bodies, NGOs, private sector, CBOs and the community in general.

The strategic approach to alleviate the problem should start from the basic apprehension of the nature and importance of transport and the role of the major stakeholders. In light of this, a code of practice, which espouses the principles of networking and the legal as well as moral commitment of stakeholders at all levels, is, presumably, an essential tool in the drive towards promoting road safety in a strategic and practical manner for an action .today. Moreover, it is essential to consider the importance of inculcating in the minds of children the significance of road safety.

Obviously, the problem of road accidents cannot be alleviated by interventions of one or few actors. It demands the joint efforts, collaborations and commitment of the various stakeholders at national, regional and international levels. Therefore, a holistic approach is significant that would make interventions, including the following areas.

- Training on defensive driving techniques and first aid;
- Ensure the existence of strong road safety management system;
- Involve non-state actors in road safety activities;
- Introduce mandatory vehicle inspection and insurance;
- Strengthen enforcement of traffic rules and regulations with the aid of modern management and technology applications;
- Improve designs of roads with all attributes;
- Introduce traffic safety curricular to the education system;
- Institute and manage safety audit practices;
- Establish research and development systems for improvement of safety measures;
- Undertake studies and measures on hazardous traffic spots;
- Enhance awareness creation activities on road safety ethics;
- Introduce incentives for excellent performers; etc.,