

PREVALENCE. According to the 2018 Annual Traffic and Road Safety report, December registered the highest number of total crashes while October showed the lowest number.

Why govt should improve care for accident victims

Justification. Road accidents continue to claim many lives of Ugandans as well as causing financial stress to the victims, writes Paul Murungi.

Five years after being involved in a road accident, Yekoyasi Tayoleke, a former truck driver, is still confined to a wheelchair at his home in Magogo Village, Iganga District.

Tayoleke says he was involved in a fatal accident in 2012 while on his way to bury a colleague in Mubende District.

"I was driving a trailer heading to Mombasa in 2012 when I received a call that my co-driver had died. I parked the trailer, went home, picked up my own car and left for burial," he recalls.

Tayoleke adds: "I drove at breakneck speed on our way to Mubende. While almost reaching Kiganda near Mubende District, the right tyre of my car burst and went off. I told other passengers in the car to keep calm but one woman, on realising that the tyre had burst, wanted to take over from me. We ended up fighting for the steering wheel and she ended up plucking out the hand brake."

He says he decided to veer off the road and ended up hitting an ant hill. The lady in the co-driver's seat died on spot, and Tayoleke blacked out that night after hitting the anthill.

Harrowing tale

"I woke up the next day while in Mubende Hospital. I was then transferred to Rubaga Hospital. I spent one month at Rubaga Hospital where they operated on my spine at Shs3.5 million. My family realised the costs were increasingly getting out of hand and then requested the hospital administration to transfer me to Mulago hospital," he narrates.

At Mulago, the doctors discovered Tayoleke's corset around his waist had started rotting and immediately replaced it.

He spent one and a half years at Mulago hospital. During that time, Tayoleke faced both health and financial implications.

"During that period, my children dropped out of school and I sold all my cattle, goats and plots of land to

get treated. I left Mulago in a wheel chair and went back to Iganga almost penniless. I can't drive anymore and have to depend on my family, friends and relatives for financial support," he says.

Tayoleke is not alone. Road accidents continue to claim many lives of Ugandans as well as causing financial stress to the victims.

Against this background, the Uganda Professional Drivers Network (UPDN) is advocating for legislation in Parliament demanding government intervention and funding for post-crash victims in serious and fatal accidents.

Given the severe road safety challenges, UPDN believes that there is minimal commitment from both the political and technical leadership at central and local government levels.

Mr Ndugu Omongo, the chief executive officer at UPDN, says as government moves to amend the Traffic and Road Safety Act, 1998, it should provide for a section in the Act that compels government to take full responsibility of funding improved post-crash care support for all Ugandans who get involved in fatal and severe accidents.

“Within this challenging context, road safety culture and attitudes in Uganda are declining to the detriment of the safety of road users. This is largely due to weak leadership for road safety, declining priority of allocation of resources and diminishing capacity for road safety interventions,” UNITED NATIONS ROAD SAFETY PERFORMANCE REVIEW FOR UGANDA, 2018.

He says the current law does not provide or give sole responsibility to government to cater for accident victims.

Mr Omongo says this is in line with the UN General Assembly resolution that declared the 3rd Sunday of every November as World Remembrance of Road Accident Victims.

Under resolution 64/255, the United Nations declared the Decade of Action for Road Safety in 2010 and established the five pillars for road safety. Many countries have adopted this day and have used it to champion the cause for road safety.



In pain. An accident victim at St Mary's Hospital, Lacor, in Gulu District in 2016. FILE PHOTO



Aftermath. Yekoyasi Tayoleke, a former truck driver, in a wheelchair following an accident in 2012. PHOTO BY PAUL MURUNGI

The five pillars from the UN Declaration on Road Safety include safer roads, safer vehicles, safer road users and mobility, road safety management, and improved post-crash response.

"We have realised most families never recover financially after accidents. We need stakeholders and victims to speak out on this.

Sometimes the President gives cash to accident victims. But that is not enough because we have seen victims who ordinarily have nowhere to begin from. We need government to at least provide a national ambulance number, a police number for security and we also need counsellors to provide psycho-social support," Mr Omongo adds.

Law on compensation

Usually by Ugandan law, an accident victim has to be compensated through a motor third cover insurance policy. However, this is not the case with many road accident victims going without any compensation.

Mr Paul Kavuma, the Uganda Insurance Association chief executive officer, says motor third cover is a social protection insurance instituted by the government to ensure that all third parties are protected when they use roads in Uganda. Through the contributions of every vehicle owner, a pool is created so that road accident victims are compensated from this pool or fund.

"The ultimate beneficiary of this insurance is the citizens of this country and it is within the citizens' rights to pursue compensation under this insurance. It is an opportunity to reduce the impact of accidents on traffic accident victims and their families as well as a means to improve on road usage to reduce such accidents," he advises.

Mr Kavuma says motor third insurance provides for compensation to any one aside from the motor vehicle owner and the insurance company for bodily injury and death and, therefore, is more attached to an individual. It predominantly seeks to compensate and mitigate for medical expenses incurred to a third party as a result of a motor accident. The current Motor Third Party Act, 1989, allows compensation of up to Shs1 million.



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Shs4.4 trillion

THE IMPACT. The overall annual cost of road crashes is currently estimated at Shs4.4 trillion, representing 5 per cent of Uganda's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

10 Ugandans perish daily in road accidents - report

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KAMPALA: Road crashes in Uganda are likely to increase and even double within the next 10 years unless effective interventions are implemented, according to the United Nations (UN) Road Safety Performance Review for Uganda, 2018.

During the performance review for Uganda, the UN established that the magnitude of road safety challenge is serious and has unfortunately failed to attract the necessary attention for appropriate interventions.

The review indicates that at present, Uganda seems highly unlikely to achieve the goals of the United Nations Decade of Action for Road Safety of stabilising and reducing the forecast level of road fatalities by 2020.

2,920

Most affected. A total of 2,920 males were killed in traffic crashes compared to 769 females in 2018.

On average, Uganda loses about 10 people per day in road traffic crashes, the highest in East Africa. The overall annual cost of road crashes is currently estimated at Shs4.4 trillion, representing 5 per cent of Uganda's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

"Within this challenging context, road safety culture and attitudes in Uganda are declining to the detriment of the safety of road users. This is largely due to weak leadership for road safety, declining priority of allocation of resources and diminishing capacity for road safety interventions, mainly driven by consistently low commitment to road safety matters, reduced interest of development partners in road safety, non-participation of crucial stakeholders in road safety, and private sector and civil society's reduced interest and lackluster actions to mitigate the challenges," the review reads in part.

The cost of fatal accidents continues to have a ripple effect on families across the country, from losing loved ones to huge financial implications in terms of hospital bills and life.

Mr Charles Ssebambulidde, the public relations officer of the Traffic Police Directorate, says the major cause of road



Fatal. Police officers at a scene of an accident on Gulu-Nakasongola highway in 2014. FILE PHOTO



Crash. The wreckage of two vehicles following an accident on Masaka road recently. FILE PHOTO

accidents is human error. He says driving at high speed and bad roads are other leading causes.

According to the 2018 Annual Traffic and Road Safety report, December registered the highest number of total crashes while October showed the lowest number.

The report shows that accidents claimed 3,194 people during the year, slightly above the 3,051 deaths registered in 2017.

The number went up despite a reduction in road accidents from 13,244 in 2017 to 12,805 in 2018. At least 5,245 of these

lunge due to the high volumes and nature of transport operations. The entire country and, in particular, Kampala City, is served by an unregulated public transport system, with most of the vehicles in poor mechanical condition, coupled with poor driving skills.

Deadly time

According to Mr Ssebambulidde, most accidents have been reported between 4pm and 9pm because at that time, there is increased motorisation on roads and low visibility, which lead to drivers losing focus on black spots, and at such a time, some traffic police officers have retired home.

An analysis of death by gender showed that more males (74 per cent) were involved in crashes than females. A total of 2,920 males were killed in traffic crashes compared to 769 females in the period under review. In addition, more males (7, 673) were seriously

injured in traffic crashes than females (2,666) in 2018. The Uganda Police report also indicates that for every 100 crashes, about 29 people are killed. "We developed the Fika Salama policy that is under implementation on all roads across the country. We deployed traffic police on different points along highways to deal with road carnage," Mr Ssebambulidde says.

"Sensitisation through media campaigns are being implemented by police. We sensitise motorists on proper road behaviour and we have extended this campaign in primary schools where we train pupils on different road signs. We need to improve on our roads and provide pedestrian sidewalks, identify dark spots, create barriers to avoid head-on collisions. For instance, the Entebbe Expressway is demarcated with barriers to avoid head-on collisions," he adds.

bulidde says. Road safety statistics show that urban areas have a big road safety chal-

