



Empowering road freight transport operators to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic

Project Location:	Uganda
Project Start Date:	July 2020
Project Duration:	Five months

Introduction:

Uganda's first recorded case of the Corona Virus 2019 (COVID-19) was on 21st March 2020. Ten days earlier, the WHO had announced that the COVID-19 outbreak, which had already taken hold in much of East Africa, including Kenya, Tanzania and the Democratic Republic of Congo, could be characterised as a global pandemic.

Road transporters quickly became considered as essential workers ensuring the food security of the some of the continent's most vulnerable people, as well as delivering essential goods and medicines to help combat the pandemic. However, with inter-city and cross-border travel largely prohibited in Uganda, some observers attributed the growing number of COVID-19 cases entering the country to incoming cross-border transport, and as a result, truck drivers began to face increased scrutiny whilst enduring evermore challenging and unpredictable hazards to keep supply chains functioning.

Governments across the East African Community (EAC) responded by introducing a variety of different testing regimes at border crossings leading to long tailbacks and delays of several weeks at some points of entry. In Uganda, trucks were limited to single occupancy, and drivers were mandated to stay in their cabs at all times. They were also banned from staying in local hotels and guest houses on route. There was growing concern among key stakeholders that these restrictions could lead to drivers taking fewer rest stops, increasing the likelihood of fatigue. In addition, with fewer vehicles on the roads and less congestion generally, it was thought that vehicles could be travelling at higher speeds possibly leading to an increase in the severity of road traffic incidents.

At the time, Transaid, together with Safe Way Right Way (SWRW) were implementing the Professional Driver Training-Uganda (PDT-U) project, funded by GIZ. With GIZ's approval, Transaid and SWRW reallocated a proportion of project funds to supporting activities targeting truck drivers experiencing the following challenges:

- Increased risk of exposure to COVID-19 virus;
- Visible hostility towards drivers in some areas;
- Deteriorating working conditions due to locally enforced action in response to COVID-19.

Transaid and SWRW partnered with local transport actors and the Ministry of Health to achieve the following objectives:

- Develop and distribute driver specific COVID-19 factsheets;
- Distribute Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) packages;
- Deliver accurate and up to date face-to-face sensitisation;

- Raise awareness of the challenges faced by drivers to the wider community.

To achieve these objectives, the project team developed driver-specific COVID-19 sensitisation and road safety messaging. This included printed factsheets, which were distributed by trained Field Officers along with face-to-face sensitisation at six key locations where drivers congregated, including four border crossings. To extend the reach of this information campaign to drivers working across the country, a WhatsApp messaging app was also launched, and three radio jingles were produced and played on two Ugandan radio stations. Drivers also received PPE packages so they could reduce their risk of exposure whilst being seen to be adhering to local guidelines.

This technical brief details the activities implemented and the associated outcomes.

Methodology:

Having worked closely with the transport industry in Uganda as part of the (PDT-U) project since 2016, Transaid and SWRW had a strong understanding of the day to day challenges experienced by truck drivers, as well as extensive networks within the sector from which to draw on.

The absence of COVID-19 sensitisation materials addressing the needs of mobile workers, and cross-border transporters in particular, was thought to be limiting the uptake and adherence to national guidelines. In addition, the closure of many roadside businesses meant drivers ability to purchase basic supplies, including handwashing soap and potable water, as well as access to ablution facilities, was largely limited to a reduced number of designated rest stops, many of which were overwhelmed or poorly maintained.

Working with the Amalgamated Transport and General Workers Union (ATGWU) and the Uganda Professional Drivers Network (UPDN), an information factsheet featuring driver-specific COVID-19 sensitisation and key road safety messaging was developed. An additional cleaning guide detailing the steps needed to sanitise commonly touched points inside and outside the cab was also produced.

These printed materials were included in a package of locally procured PPE featuring a washable and reusable face mask, a tablet of handwashing soap and a 20-litre water container to ensure that drivers had access to a water source in their cabs.

Sixteen Field Officers, each with prior experience of working with truck drivers, were recruited by ATGWU and UPDN and trained by Safe Way Right Way driver trainers, using a specially developed curriculum, to deliver face-to-face sensitisation and distribute PPE packages to truck drivers at six chosen locations. The content of the sensitisation incorporated recent changes to national guidelines to ensure accuracy, and its intention was to explain and reinforce the correct and appropriate use of each PPE item.

Aiming to reach truck drivers at their point of entry or departure into and from Uganda, the project team staged interventions at Malaba, Busia, Elegu and Mutukula border crossings. Rest stops at Pakwach and Lukaya were also targeted to ensure that domestic drivers and those crossing into Uganda from Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo were engaged.

The key messaging developed for the printed materials was reiterated and expanded for three radio jingles recorded in English, Swahili and Luganda, and broadcast via local radio stations. In addition, a WhatsApp messaging app developed and promoted by Field Officers, allowed drivers to download a complete set of printed materials (in one of four languages), as well as radio jingles, to their smartphone after a few simple inputs.

Outcomes:

A total 3,994 complete PPE packages were distributed by the project team between August and November 2020. Of these, 3,500 drivers received face-to-face sensitisation at Busia (1,100), Malaba (700), Elegu (650), Pakwach (650), Lukaya (150) and Mutukula (150). The remaining 494 complete packages were distributed by SWRW to transporter groups based in and around Kampala for distribution to their drivers.

Due to initial delays in the procurement of sufficient PPE packages, 200 partial packages (excluding water containers) were also distributed along with face-to-face sensitisation to truck drivers at Busia border crossing. Finally, an additional 433 facemasks and 91 COVID-19 factsheets were distributed individually, most of which were handed to truck drivers and those coming into regular contact with truck drivers at Busia and Malaba borders.

Data collected by the Field Officers showed that the project had a large regional reach, with drivers originating from nine different countries, including as far away as Sudan, Eritrea and Somalia.

The radio jingles were broadcast a total of 120 times in three languages for 30-days in the Central and West Nile regions potentially reaching 1.07 million people¹. Uptake of the WhatsApp chatbot was more challenging with a recorded 163 unique users from seven different countries, and 125 language pack downloads over a 68-day period.

Conclusion:

This project aimed to deliver driver-specific COVID-19 sensitisation, key road safety messaging and packages of basic PPE to between the 3,500-5,000 truck drivers, and up to 10,000 drivers remotely. The project team was able to reach these targets in five months due in part to Transaid's ongoing programming presence in Uganda at the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak, SWRW's ability to identify and coordinate activities on the ground, and ATGWU and UPDN's ability to mobilise Field Officers for delivery.

Disbelief and misinformation around COVID-19 within the driver community were among the early challenges that the project encountered. The collaboration with ATGWU and UPDN proved vital both in terms of developing context-appropriate information, but also in affording the necessary access and trust to encourage and affect behaviour change. Guidance from the Ministry of Health also helped ensure that the information that went into circulation was accurate but also robust enough to withstand incremental change.

The format of the project is both replicable and scalable, taking into

¹ Based on listener awareness ratings of 62% of 1,721,896 population

account any necessary adjustments to ensure the information delivered is aligned with current national protocols. As the pandemic advances, it is likely that supply chain demand will increasingly fall to road transporters, and the ability of small and medium-sized operators will almost certainly continue to be limited by a lack of resources to support and protect their drivers in the field.

Tools Utilised: TOT COVID-19 training curriculum, COVID-19 factsheets (general and cab sanitisation guidance), radio jingles.

Partners: Safe Way Right Way, Amalgamated Transport and General Workers Union, Ugandan Professional Drivers Network, Ugandan Ministry of Health, GIZ.

The project is heavily backed by Transaid member companies from the UK Transport and Logistics industry, including DHL & the UK Road Haulage Association (RHA).

About Transaid:

Transaid is an international UK development charity that aims to reduce poverty and improve livelihoods across Africa and the developing world through creating better transport. Transaid was founded by Save the Children and the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport. Our Patron is HRH The Princess Royal. Transaid specializes in the following:

- Building the capacity of public health authorities to provide effective, safe and cost efficient transport management systems to promote equitable access to primary health care services.
- Developing and improving logistics and supply chain systems to enhance the delivery of medicines, equipment and relief services to vulnerable communities.
- Promoting effective partnerships to support and enhance community participation in developing sustainable transport solutions in rural areas.
- Developing and delivering transport and logistics training and qualifications for public and private sector operators.

Transaid has the capacity and reach to lead projects throughout the developing world, but is equally capable of providing niche technical assistance to large scale health systems strengthening projects. Transaid maintains strong relationships with a number of leading international organizations including donor agencies such as DfID, DANIDA and USAID, and implementing organizations such as Health Partners International, Options Consulting, John Snow Inc. and Management Sciences for Health.

Contact:

Transaid
137 Euston Road, London NW1 2AA
United Kingdom

t: +44 (0)20 7387 8136
f: +44 (0)20 7387 2669
e: info@transaid.org
www.transaid.org

Transaid Worldwide Services Ltd is registered in England as a company limited by guarantee. Registered no 3511363. Registered charity no 1072105. Patron HRH The Princess Royal.