

A collaborative approach to addressing motorcycle safety in Kenya

As Transaid continues to implement a project to establish a National Helmet Wearing Coalition in Kenya, funded by global road safety philanthropy the FIA Foundation, one thing that has become clear is the complexity of the determining factors linked to motorcycle safety.

This issue is evident in the number of key stakeholders identified and engaged with over the last two and a half years. Whilst this project always understood the need to involve organisations and agencies from multiple sectors in establishing a coalition, it perhaps didn't anticipate the level of effort needed to engage with over 70 different organisations to date. However, throughout, the project team has been at pains to build relationships with these organisations, not least to understand where the greatest need is and how this as a project, can maximise its impact.

Rapid growth within the motorcycle taxi industry in sub-Saharan Africa continues unabated. When Transaid commenced implementation of this project in 2021, the National Transport and Safety Authority

(NTSA) reported there to be 1.9 million registered motorcycle taxis (locally known as *boda bodas*) in Kenya. In September 2023, according to the NTSA, this figure had grown to a reported 2.3 million *boda bodas* on Kenya's roads, equating to an increase of almost 15,000 every month. Whilst this growth is transforming mobility in rural and urban areas, it comes at a cost to people's safety, with approximately 35 percent of road traffic fatalities currently linked to motorcycle use, according to the National Police Service.

In this context, Transaid is seeking to initiate a collaborative approach to address some of the key factors influencing motorcycle safety. The National Helmet Wearing Coalition currently comprises representatives from 17 different organisations including government, civil society, academia, private sector and rider associations. The Coalition has identified the urgent need for stronger enforcement to save lives on Kenya's roads, and plans to support this objective in a number of ways.



Image 1: Motorcycle riders from KRO Boda Boda Sacco in Nairobi, Kenya

Firstly, the Coalition is harnessing the expertise of its members in implementing scalable pilot projects. With Transaid's support, Safe Way Right Way (SWRW) Kenya - a non-governmental organisation registered in 2011 to mobilise the private sector and other actors in promoting road safety - is working with other partners to develop a myth-busting social media campaign to build awareness amongst motorcycle taxi operators about the importance of helmet safety and the need to invest in good quality helmets. This pilot is also recruiting and training 100 peer educators to act as helmet safety champions by sensitising their fellow riders. Finally, a helmet safety module is being developed and integrated into ongoing rider training which is being delivered as part of SWRW's wider programmes.

In parallel, the project team are supporting Flone Initiative - an organisation established in 2011 as a result of a recognition of the need for an initiative that would improve the lives of public transport operators and create safer spaces for women - in developing a training manual, and conducting training targeting local government officials in Nakuru County, with a view to influencing a higher priority given to helmet safety on the part of enforcers. Flone will reach 80 officials which combined with the new training materials, they hope to scale up to more counties in the near future to contribute to stronger enforcement.

These efforts to strengthen enforcement will be reinforced by new research which is investigating the health costs associated with motorcycle crashes in Kenya. This study will examine retrospective data collected from two hospitals in Nairobi County, and gather personal testimonies from motorcycle crash victims who will contribute to the research. The research will be launched in 2024 and will be bolstered by advocacy efforts from Coalition members to influence greater investment in enforcement nationwide.

The National Helmet Wearing Coalition scored a success at the end of 2023 by ensuring that establishing a helmet testing facility in Kenya will be a key target for the forthcoming National Road Safety Action Plan (2024-2027), which is due to be launched in early 2024.

Kenya is different from many other countries in sub-Saharan Africa in that it introduced a national helmet standard (KS_77), which has been in place since 2012. Despite this, sub-standard, counterfeit imported helmets continue to dominate the market. Research has revealed that certified motorcycle helmets reduce the risk of severe head injury by 69 percent and death by 42 percent. One major constraint to preventing sub-standard helmets from entering the market is the lack of a helmet testing laboratory in Kenya, which limits KEBS' ability to carry out critical performance tests.



Image 2: Kenyan Bureau of Standards standardisation mark

For the domestic helmet market, testing is limited to visual inspections linked to the construction of the helmet, the materials used, as well as labelling and instructions. All approved helmets must display the Kenyan Bureau of Standards (KEBS) standardisation mark. Imported helmets are required to be tested in their country of origin at KEBS certified testing facilities before being shipped to Kenya. These helmets must display the KEBS international standardisation mark. The proliferation of poor-quality helmets, however, implies that the lack of testing capacity in Kenya is being exploited to the detriment of motorcycle users who purchase these helmets. KEBS acknowledges that there are gaps in its ability to enforce the current helmet standard.

The Coalition is working with KEBS and the NTSA to help secure funding to procure the appropriate equipment in order to establish the first helmet testing facility in Kenya. It will also work with KEBS

to ensure that the relevant training is delivered to optimise use of the testing lab and will work closely with KEBS to monitor its impact. For a relatively small sum of money, this initiative should stem the flow of poor-quality helmets entering the country, protecting the lives of millions of Kenyan citizens who utilise this mode of transport on a daily basis, as well as supporting the growth of a fledgling helmet manufacturing sector in Kenya.

The collective voice that a coalition of organisations and agencies offers is definitely a strength when it comes to instigating positive change, as is the pool of expertise that member organisations from various sectors bring to this particular Coalition. Indeed, there are challenges, not least building relationships and understanding the dynamics between members, but this approach is vital particularly where complex issues such as those influencing motorcycle rider safety are concerned.



Image 3: Members of the National Helmet Wearing Coalition during a meeting in June 2023