

MADEREVA SALAMA ZAIDI (SAFER ROADS)

Project Location	Mombasa, Kenya
Project Start Date	November 2024
Project Duration	Seven Months

Introduction

Anchored by the Port of Mombasa in Kenya, the Northern Corridor serves as the principal trade and transport artery across East and Central Africa. Extending more than 1,700 kilometres, the corridor plays a critical role in advancing regional economic integration, interlinking road, rail, and pipeline networks across several landlocked countries, including Uganda, Rwanda, South Sudan, and Burundi. As a key regional gateway, the port handles trade flows accounting for over 70% of regional cargo throughput.

The corridor’s high freight volumes, driven by regional dependence on long-distance road transport, pose significant health and safety risks for truck drivers and the communities along the roadside. Between 2019 and 2020, Kenya’s National Transport and Safety Authority recorded a troubling 64% increase in road traffic fatalities along the corridor, underscoring the growing urgency of addressing safety concerns.

Many truck drivers in East Africa have limited access to regular road safety education due to long working hours, irregular routes, and few training opportunities. Taking time away from the road often means losing income, making participation difficult. Low literacy levels compound the challenge, leaving many drivers to rely on experience and peer learning rather than formal instruction.

Beyond training, the health and wellbeing of truck drivers are also closely linked to road safety outcomes. Extended hours, disrupted sleep, and limited opportunities for exercise place drivers at heightened risk of non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, and cardiovascular conditions. At the same time, barriers to healthcare, including limited access to reliable information and timely medical advice, can exacerbate these risks, delay diagnosis, and increase the likelihood of preventable illness or transmission.

In November 2024, with support from the Lloyd’s Register Foundation and in partnership with North Star Alliance,

Transaid launched a targeted information campaign combining road safety and health messaging to promote safer road user behaviour and improved uptake of basic health services accessible via the North Star Alliance’s network of Wellness Centres, two of which are located near to Mombasa port.

During outreach activities with truck drivers in Mombasa, Transaid learned that many drivers were experiencing eye irritation and vision problems. In the context of poor road conditions, inadequate infrastructure, and other occupational hazards, maintaining good vision is essential to road safety. Over the course of the project, and through the same two Wellness Centres, Transaid mobilised additional funding from two UK trusts to provide more than 4,000 eye screenings and distribute over 900 corrective lenses.

Methodology

For more than two decades, Transaid and its partners have worked to strengthen the link between driver health and road safety by designing and delivering targeted health interventions and bringing healthcare solutions directly to the locations where truck drivers converge along their routes. This approach allows for the rapid dissemination of tailored road safety and health messaging, while also creating opportunities for dialogue with drivers and transporters to identify and respond to emerging or underserved health and safety challenges.

Two factsheets were developed, the first promoted HIV testing and encouraged truck drivers to know their status, recognising that long-distance drivers and those they interact with are particularly vulnerable to HIV transmission and that ongoing efforts are needed to reduce stigma and support treatment uptake. The second factsheet focused on cargo security, providing a walk-around checklist, and was developed in partnership with the Kenya Transporters Association. Both factsheets, produced in Swahili and English, were distributed in person by outreach workers and clinicians at North Star Alliance’s Wellness Centres in Jomvu and Kipevu, selected for their proximity to the Port of Mombasa and high foot and vehicle traffic.

While the team was well-versed in HIV messaging and broadly familiar with road safety principles, a refresher was organised to strengthen their confidence and update their knowledge on topics specific to cargo security. A Mombasa-based haulier hosted a practical training session where participants observed key safety checks, including

load-securing techniques, tying strategies and the use of anchor points on trucks. Clinicians then shared these messages with truck drivers, typically in small groups of three to five, to encourage open discussion and peer learning. This rapid sensitisation typically lasted around ten minutes, after which the factsheets were provided as leaflets or stickers, and many drivers chose to display the stickers on their trucks, further raising awareness among other road users along their routes.

During these exchanges, Transaid became aware of widespread eye complaints, which prompted the team to expand the project to include eye testing. Additional funding was mobilised, and the new eye health activity was integrated into ongoing efforts without disrupting the original campaign. For delivery, Transaid and North Star Alliance partnered with DOT Glasses, which specialises in easy-to-assemble eyewear for mobile workers and underserved populations.

The project ran for seven months, with factsheet distribution from November 2024 to March 2025, followed by the eye health initiative from March to May 2025. DOT Glasses trained eight North Star Alliance clinicians, enabling them to safely conduct vision screenings, perform eye tests, prescribe and fit corrective lenses, and identify issues needing specialist referral in central Mombasa. As qualified healthcare providers, North Star Alliance clinicians could integrate vision assessments into existing services, offering eye health checks alongside routine non-communicable disease screenings.

Vision screening kits for low-resource settings were provided by DOT Glasses. To address literacy and language barriers, the standard Snellen chart was replaced with a “tumbling E” chart, where patients indicate the E’s orientation with hand gestures. Additional equipment for assessing eye health and detecting serious conditions was also sourced from DOT.

Results

A total of 1,795 truck drivers received factsheets and in-person sensitisation, representing a 50% increase over the project’s original target. WhatsApp channels managed by the Kenya Transporters Association expanded the project’s reach, delivering digital factsheets to an estimated 5,000 truck drivers nationwide, highlighting the strength of engaging drivers through trusted peer networks.

The printed factsheets and stickers gave outreach teams new tools to engage drivers in truck parks, spark conversations, and notify them of available healthcare services. As a result, both Wellness Centres saw a substantial increase in attendance, with footfall rising by 108% at Kipevu and 104% at Jomvu.

Truck drivers and roadside residents accessed a broad range of specialist services at both Wellness Centres, including drug and alcohol counselling for 698 individuals, and 2,656 individuals were screened for communicable diseases such as HIV and tuberculosis.

A total of 4,107 individuals received vision assessments and eye health screenings. Of those screened, 971 (24%) were

prescribed glasses, and 110 (3%) were referred to a specialist clinic for further evaluation and treatment.

Many of the prescribed lenses addressed near-vision difficulties and glare-related fatigue, reflecting the demands of close-range visual tasks and long hours on the road. Along the Northern Corridor, drivers are frequently exposed to the sun at sunrise and sunset, increasing the need for proper eye protection.

Conclusion

The development of new and engaging messaging materials boosted outreach activities and drove higher attendance at both Wellness Centres. Many drivers initially came for HIV services but also accessed other free healthcare services. On-the-spot dispensing of glasses proved effective, and a pilot system letting drivers collect prescriptions from other Wellness Centres further increased engagement.

Although modest in scale, findings from the eye health activity align with the very limited existing evidence. In Cameroon, only 15% of professional drivers have ever had an eye test, and 25% report poor vision (Vofo et al., 2021), while in Nigeria, 30% experience impaired vision (Obi, 2019). Despite stricter licensing in recent years, many drivers joined the sector before mandatory vision tests were introduced, leaving poor visual acuity as an overlooked risk to all road users.

Critical healthcare and road safety messaging for truck drivers should be regularly updated, and this project has shown that engaging drivers along their routes is highly effective. Future initiatives should consider including vision and eye health components to enhance road safety while capturing data to address a present knowledge gap that can better inform policies, interventions, and targeted support across the region.

About Transaid

Founded by Save the Children, The Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport (CILT), and its patron, HRH The Princess Royal, Transaid transforms lives through safe, available, and sustainable transport.

Our partner-led approach to improving road safety focuses on promoting safe driver behaviour and advocating for quality truck, bus and motorcycle training with long term programmes in Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.

Our partner-led approach to improving access to healthcare includes establishing emergency transport systems (ETS), primarily in rural areas, to reduce the barriers to healthcare posed by lack of transport. We are also working to strengthen health supply chains in collaboration with local partners and governments.

Transaid maintains strong relationships with a number of leading international organisations, including: DfID, GIZ, USAID, DAI Global Health, Society for Family Health, TRL and World Bicycle Relief.

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