

Looking back on 10 years of global road safety

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Abstract

Every year more than 1.35 million people lose their lives on the road and tens of millions more are injured, some permanently. Since the early 2000's there has been renewed focus on the issue with the United Nations, World Health Organization and the World Bank placing the issue higher on their agendas. Guided by United Nations General Assembly, World Health Assembly resolutions and ministerial level conferences on the global road safety crisis, multi-sectoral partnerships have synthesised the evidence, advocated for action (there are two SDG targets with an ambitious goal of reducing by 50% deaths and injuries from road traffic crashes), raised public awareness, generated funding, piloted interventions and monitored progress. And yet the total number of deaths has plateaued despite some sporadic country level successes. More needs to be done – more people need to be trained in countries to deliver, monitor and evaluate a systems approach to road safety, more solid evidence of what works in low-resourced settings is needed (including sustainable transportation options) and there needs to be a greater focus on optimising care and support for those injured in crashes – if we are to begin to see numbers come down in the next decade.

Key words:

Road safety, Road traffic injuries, Accidents, Prevention, Injury, Crashes, Global

Introduction

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) there were 1.35 million road traffic deaths globally in 2016 and between 20 and 50 million more people suffer non-fatal injuries millions and/or disabilities.¹ The majority of these collisions occurred in low- and middle-income countries and involved vulnerable road users – pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists. In addition, road traffic collisions are the leading killer of those aged 15 to 29 years. As can be seen in Table 1 there has been very little progress over the last decade despite concerted efforts. Road traffic fatality rates remain unacceptably high in Africa and the south-East Asia regions where they are considerably higher than the 18.2 per 100,000 population global average. However, some progress has been made globally as well as in some regions and countries. This short commentary outlines the progress made in the last 10 years and highlights some of the challenges that lie ahead.

Getting road safety onto the global agenda

The issue of road safety came to the forefront with the launch of the 1999 *World Disaster Report*² which showed that collisions were the leading cause of death for humanitarian workers. This led to concerted efforts by the WHO and the World Bank culminating in the publication of the *World Report on road traffic injury prevention*³ on World Health Day in 2004.⁴ The report moved away from the traditional paradigm of blaming the road user to one of a safe system and made eight recommendations to countries which were approved through both a United Nations (UN) General Assembly (GA) resolution 58/289⁵ and World Health Assembly resolution 57.10⁶ later in 2004. The UN Road Safety Collaboration (UNRSC)⁷ was inaugurated later that year to coordinate and strengthen global and regional road safety efforts to implement the recommendations of the world Report. The UNRSC's vision is that death and injury should not be the price of mobility. Members of the UNRSC^a – UN and other international agencies, governments, foundations, civil society and the private sector – work together through project groups to implement the objectives of the Collaboration and plan major global events such as the series of ministerial meetings, UN road safety weeks, and the World Day of Remembrance for Victims of road traffic crashes. The UNRSC was instrumental in the development of a series of “Good Practice” manuals addressing the recommendations of the World Report. In response, the Commission for Global Road Safety was established in 2005 which aimed to raise the political response to road traffic injuries ensuring that road safety was fully recognised by the UN as a developmental issue. This in turn encouraged the World Bank to establish a funding mechanism (the Global Road Safety Facility) to assist countries to implement good practices.

Progress over the last decade

In 2009, the first *Global Status Report on Road Safety*⁸ was published revealing the extent of the problem and providing a snapshot of where countries were with regard to the implementation of the recommendations in the World Report. These data provided the basis for discussion at the First Ministerial meeting on road safety hosted by the Russian government in November 2009. This pivotal meeting called for, through the Moscow Declaration, a Decade of Action for Road Safety (2011–2020) – endorsed through UN GA resolution 64/255⁹ in 2010. That year also saw Bloomberg Philanthropies announce an USD125 million investment to implement good practices in 10 low- and middle-income countries^{10, 11} and a first meeting of global civil society actors (the Global Alliance of NGOs was formally established in 2011).

^a <https://www.who.int/roadsafety/about/partners/en/>

A Global Plan for the Decade of Action (2011–2020) was developed and launched in 2011 encouraging countries to implement good practices in 5 pillars, viz. road safety management, safer roads and mobility, safer vehicles, safer road users and post-crash response^{12, 13}. Indicators were proposed for each of the pillars – a total of 50 core and optional indicators for the 5 pillars as well as global monitoring. The 2nd *Global Status report on road safety* published in 2013 provided the baseline data for Decade of Action¹⁴ and a mid-term review was undertaken and published in 2017.¹³ Follow up monitoring at the end of the decade is proposed as is a full evaluation of the global activities undertaken.

In 2015 the issue of road safety was raised to the highest level through the inclusion of two Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets (3.6 and 11.2) on road safety; the hosting by the Brazilian government of the 2nd Ministerial meeting on road safety; Bloomberg Philanthropies announcing a further USD125 million investment to address road safety and the UN Secretary General announcing Jean Todt as a Special Envoy on Road Safety and WHO declaring Michael Bloomberg as a Global Ambassador for NCDs. SDG target 3.6, with an endpoint of 2020, ambitiously requires a 50% reduction of road traffic deaths and injuries from the baseline of around 1.25 million. This target spawned renewed awareness and an alignment of national strategies to the Decade framework in a number of countries.^b The Brasilia Declaration – the outcome document from the 2nd Ministerial level meeting – called for the development of global voluntary targets for road safety risk factors and service delivery in order to guide Member States towards attainment of SDG target 3.6.^c

Further guidance was provided to countries through the publication of the Save LIVES technical package by WHO in 2017¹⁵. The package, which included 22 interventions in 6 domains, encouraged governments to conduct local assessments and implement the most appropriate interventions which, based on published evidence, would prevent or mitigate the consequences of road traffic collisions and thus save lives. In order to assist organizations and countries further, a UN Road Safety Trust Fund was also set up and the first USD 1 million was provided for the implementation of five pilot projects in 2018.^d These projects included advancing street design in Ethiopia, improving data collection in Cote d'Ivoire and Senegal, strengthening legal frameworks in Arab countries, reducing speeds in the Philippines and building capacity for improved urban planning and sustainable transportation to keep children safer in Paraguay, the Philippines and South Africa.

The 4th Global status report published in late 2018 revealed little change in the 10-years since 2009, both in numbers (see Table 1) and good practices (see Figure 1). Reasons cited for this include rapid urbanization and motorization in many countries coupled with inadequate enforcement, inferior safety standards for vehicles and roads, and poor road user behaviour such as driving under the influence, speeding, not wearing helmets and seat-belts, etc. There is therefore an urgent need for countries to scale up their enforcement activities, design smarter roads, sell safer vehicles and deliver powerful social marketing campaigns and share their successes in Sweden in February 2020 at the 3rd Ministerial road safety meeting where the focus will be on achieving global goals.^e

^b https://www.who.int/roadsafety/decade_of_action/plan/national/en/

^c https://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/road_traffic/road-safety-targets/en/

^d <http://www.unece.org/unrstf/home.html>

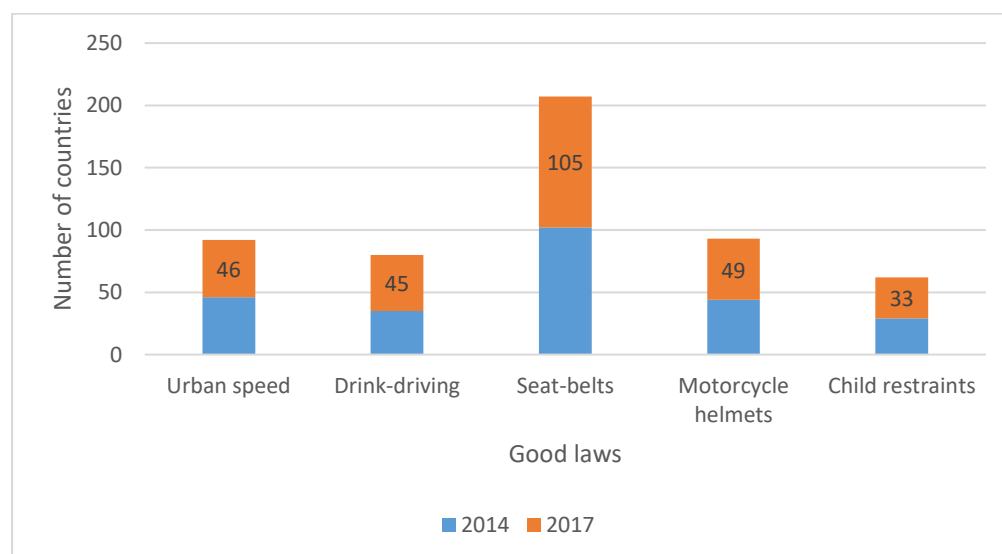
^e <https://www.roadsafetysweden.com/>

Table 1: Changes in road traffic deaths between 2008 and 2017

	Year of data	
	2008*	2017#
Global population (billions)	6.7	7.3
Global total registered vehicle fleet (billion)	1.3	2.0
DEATHS		
Estimated number of road traffic deaths (millions)	1.23	1.35
Death rates per 100,000 population		
The world	18.8	18.2
African region	32.2	26.6
Region of the Americas	15.8	15.6
Eastern Mediterranean region	32.2	18.0
European region	13.4	9.3
South-east Asia region	16.6	20.7
Western Pacific region	15.6	16.9
Proportion of deaths among vulnerable road users (%)	46	54

Source: * Global status report on road safety, 2009; # Global status report on road safety, 2018

Figure 1: Countries improving their road safety laws between 2014 and 2017



Source: Global status report on road safety, 2018.

Conclusions and challenges

The last decade has shown some progress in a few countries and regions but there is an urgent need to do more as the numbers have plateaued but not yet begun to show a downward trend. The Decade of Action for Road Safety (2011–2020) and SDG 3.6 (expires 2020) have clearly had some influence on countries taking action but these need to be extended to 2030 if the current level of awareness is to be maintained. A stronger emphasis on building capacity at national levels is required as experience from donor-funded initiatives has revealed that money alone does not help if there are no adequately trained road safety practitioners in the country. Furthermore, solid

evidence of what works in low-income countries (including sustainable transportation and improved urban planning options), using robust research methodologies, is urgently required so that these can be scaled up and replicated. These activities should involve civil society/road users and co-design methodologies in order to optimise acceptance of interventions and implementation at a local level. Countries should be empowered to monitor their road safety deaths and injuries more rigorously. The reported versus estimated numbers published by WHO are testament to the need for continued support and capacity development in this area.

Finally, the post-crash phase should receive more support from the international and donor community. Sadly, even if primary prevention activities are well conducted, some injury producing collisions will still occur and therefore solid trauma services – from extrication of occupants at the crash site to justice for victims – should be implemented as this will save a significant number of lives.¹⁶

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