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**Front Cover:** When Indian school children consumed pearl millet biofortified with iron, researchers found the children had significantly improved learning and mental abilities related to perception, attention, and memory.  
**Credit** ICRISAT/Alina Paul-Boussel (see page 35)
Advocating for Road Safety in Liberia

The annual cost of road traffic crashes in Liberia are estimated to be 7% of GDP. The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH advises and supports the responsible Liberian partners on developing effective road safety policies and public awareness campaigns on traffic rules.

In road safety terms, Liberia is one of the most dangerous countries in the world. According to the estimates of WHO Liberia loses 1448 people per year in road traffic crashes. That means 33.7 people per 100,000 population. The country is the fourth worst in the world and second worst in sub-Saharan Africa.

GIZ, on behalf of the Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany (BMZ), is working in Liberia to develop capacities in the transport sector. In the years 2013-2016 the transport project financed two Road Safety Surveys and a Road Safety Review Report. Through nationwide coverage, they provided a first database and conclusions on road safety in Liberia.

The survey 2013-2014 included questions on respondents’ involvement in road traffic crashes: 31.5% of the respondents stated involvement in 1 up to 5 crashes during a three year period. This percentage was much higher – 55.7% – for motorcyclists.

Besides the human cost of accidents, the most productive age groups being killed or injured affect future economic growth. There is, also, another cost that Liberian taxpayers bear after every accident – the cost of cleaning up and restoring the roadway. The country loses $1,000 on average for every highway accident.

The high number of road deaths and injuries as well as the material damage cost the country up to 7% of its gross domestic product - that is worth about $150 million. This is more than double the sum invested in roads across the country.

Five Pillars of Road Safety

The previous studies delivered crucial findings on deficiencies in all five pillars of road safety (according to UN Decade of Action for Road Safety 2011-2020) – road safety management, safer roads & mobility, safer vehicles, safer road users, and post-crash response.

The most important up-to-date findings of these studies were the following:

■ Pillar 1: Road Safety Management. The Vehicle and Traffic Law dates from 1972 and needs to be updated, as it has not kept pace with advances in technology and changes in traffic conditions. Some of the risk factors which are not up-to-date include speed limits, drink driving, drug driving. In other cases, risk factors are not even covered by the Law 1972, such as use of motorcycle helmets, seat belts, child restraints and mobile phones. Although helmet use by motorcyclists was officially introduced by new regulations in 2008, the law remains unenforced. Another alarming fact was the following finding: Of all the people driving on Liberia’s streets, only 38% had a driver’s license and of those, only 60% passed an official test. The lack of a license applies foremost to motorcyclists, especially men, 73.5% of which do not have a license.

■ Pillar 2: Safer Roads & Mobility. It was recommended that Road Safety Audits become mandatory for the design of new roads and rehabilitation of existing ones. The Audits should, also, advise on the need to update road design standards and to ensure that safety aspects are integrated. The latter was tackled with the support of the project, as the Ministry of Public Works (MPW) and Ministry of Transport (MoT) endorsed Road Signs and Markings Standards as well as Geometric and Pavement Design Standards in July 2017. Now the goal should be harmonisation of the already present road signs on Liberian roads to those endorsed by the Standards of 2017.

■ Pillar 3: Safer Vehicles. Recommendations were to improve the vehicle registration system, decrease the number of unregistered vehicles that ply the roads of Liberia, modernise vehicle regulations to conform to modern vehicle standards and specify requirements on import of used motor vehicles; for example, that vehicles must pass a technical inspection before they can be registered.

■ Pillar 4: Safer Road Users. The survey 2013-2014 showed that almost 80% of the Liberians had not received any road safety education. Among riders and drivers, only 30-35% had had lessons on road safety. These findings led to the conclusion that road safety education should be improved and prioritised. At least, three measures need to be...
focused on: first, in the short-term the drivers and riders should be made aware of the basic rules of the road. Campaigns to raise road safety awareness are needed – through mass media (radio) and locally (local participatory processes). Second, safety education in schools must be made compulsory for all levels. Finally, in the medium to long-term, driver training and the licensing system must be radically improved.

- Pillar 5: Post-Crash Response. It was concluded that the promotion and provision of training in first-aid is necessary. The general public must be made aware of those hospitals that will handle road traffic injuries and those that will not.

Taking into consideration the high accident rate of motorcycles, the project worked together with the MoT on training for motorcycle taxis, called phen-phen, to obtain a driving license and be registered as recognised transporters. Phen-phen provides the population with a good, flexible, service and in some areas are the only mode of transportation available. However, they are poorly acquainted with safe driving practices and protective equipment. As most of them do not wear helmets when riding, most accidents result in severe injuries or death of both rider and passengers.

During the Ebola epidemic, the project gave support for protecting motorcycle and car taxi drivers and their passengers from transmission of the virus. The information and protection measures included information events, separation of the sick, promotion of reduced numbers of passengers, equipment with protective clothing and disinfectants, and regular disinfection of vehicles.

In 2017, the Ministry of Transport picked road safety as one of the priority policies to work on. The project supported the Ministry with technical assistance (TA) for road safety policy development and prioritisation. This TA proposed a way-forward for future road safety initiatives at the MoT by using a phased approach to the development of initiatives of increasing complexity following the order of:

- Road safety education
- Legislation and Regulation
- Road Safety Policy and Strategy

As the TA prioritised the raising awareness of road safety in the short-term, the idea of a large scale publicity event was born (see box). Such an event was supposed to involve a media campaign and road safety education on the day of the event, addressing some of the problems identified by the TA, such as vehicle roadworthiness (old & worn out tyres), exercises for school children (crossing the road), cycle training, and other measures.

**Involving Multipliers (Journalists) in Road Safety**

Another activity with an objective of raising awareness on road safety was a one-day workshop on Road Safety and Responsible Journalism for Liberian journalists conducted by the Liberia News Agency (LINA) in collaboration with GIZ.

The workshop brought together several media practitioners from LINA and other media outlets in the country. It
A street festival to raise awareness

The Safe Streets Festival was organised in the centre of Monrovia by the Ministry of Transport of Liberia, with the support of the National Police, GIZ, the European Union and sponsorship by the private sector.

Initially perceived as an impossible vision inspired by the European Mobility Week, it later became an illustration for a successful story.

An extensive publicity campaign preceded the event with radio advertising, radio talk shows and interviews. It was advertised all over the city and thousands of flyers [see example] were distributed with the programme and basic traffic rules.

With the Safe Streets Festival, the consequences of poor road safety reached the public agenda of Liberia for the first time ever. Never before has there been a pedestrian zone – if only for one day – in the centre of the Liberian capital. On a stage musicians performed, while local producers, small entrepreneurs and artists could offer their products at a specially foreseen market.

The Safe Streets Festival was officially inaugurated by the Mayor of Monrovia, the Deputy Chief of the National Police, Assistant Minister of Transport, EU and German Ambassadors to Liberia, GIZ Country Director, and a representative of the Liberia National Children’s Parliament.

Thousands of people of all ages and backgrounds came to the city for a five-kilometre run and participated in children’s games as well as road safety education, in form of training and quizzes. The all-day festival was accompanied by dance, drama and comedy performances with major national cultural troupes and ended with a live concert featuring Liberia’s most popular singers.

The public perceived the Safe Streets Festival as a unique and first event of its kind in the post-war Liberia.

The visual impressions of the event are to be found at the Ministry of Transport’s Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/MoTLiberia/ and on Youtube a Short documentary (2 min.): Safe Streets Festival in Monrovia, Liberia, November 2017 https://youtu.be/3ATxsi46Jyg and a Long documentary (20 min.): Liberia’s First Safe Streets Festival (long version) https://youtu.be/GC-oP99hyWc

The Project “Capacity Development in the Transport Sector in Liberia” is implemented by GIZ and co-funded by the Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany (BMZ) and the EU.

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was intended to develop knowledge, awareness and skills about road safety among Liberian journalists, to give them an idea of the causes and effects of road accidents and how they can help in addressing issues of road safety through their reports.

The workshop consisted a webinar on Road Safety in Developing Countries (SUTP Webinar: How to strategically advance road safety (24.09.2015) https://youtu.be/AJOD11ynYIY) and presentations on Road Safety in Liberia in general, and on Liberian highways in particular.

In this context GIZ and its partners consequently participated at around twenty radio talk shows with the focus on road safety. In May 2018 the Action Plan for Road Safety in Liberia, financed by the World Bank and under the guidance of Mr. Andy McLoughlin from Cardno IT Transport, was finalised and will be officially endorsed by the Government of Liberia in the coming months. The issue of road safety appears to have finally reached the political agenda.

What next?

According to John Kotter, formerly at Harvard Business School, there are eight stages for changes. The first step is to establish the sense of urgency. This allows the transition to the next stages – form a powerful guiding coalition, create a vision, communicate the vision, empower others to act on the vision, plan for and create short-term gains, consolidate the improvements and produce more change, and finally institutionalise the new approaches.

It can be claimed that the first loop of the transformation process in road safety policy in Liberia was successful. However, after a strict analysis has been done and considering the current state of the changes, the transformation may get stuck at the second stage, with the stakeholders group being re-assembled and expanded. Or, the process has already moved to a new 6th stage, which is the stage of planning for and making short-term gains.

The coalition of the committed stakeholders would include representatives of the responsible Ministries – MoT, MPW, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, and Liberia National Police – as well as NGOs like Save Life Liberia, media and international donors.

In the short term, accident data collection needs to be strengthened, a handbook with traffic rules needs to be published, traffic police needs training, the Action Plan for Road Safety needs endorsement by high-ranking officials and all responsible Ministries. Finally, a song and a radio campaign to raise awareness about the road worthiness of all vehicles need to be launched.