

Perspective on Road Safety

New Deal in Road Safety: Why we need NGOs

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Key Findings

- The Global Plan for the Decade of Action for Road Safety 2021–2030 with the target of reducing road traffic deaths and injuries by at least 50% by 2030 was launched on 28 October 2021.
- A lack of political will to road safety delivery hinders the achievement of the global target.
- NGOs have the power to increase political will through three key roles:
 - Advocacy to drive the implementation and financing of evidence-based interventions;
 - Holding decision makers accountable for road safety delivery;
 - Empowering communities to demand a Safe System.

Keywords

NGO, advocacy, accountability, political will, Global Alliance of NGOs for Road Safety, road safety financing

Background

Road safety has been receiving increasing global attention, for example: the inclusion of road safety in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adoption of resolution 74/299 “Improving global road safety”; Stockholm Declaration (2020) reflecting the recommendations of the Academic Expert Group of the 3rd Global Ministerial Conference on Road Safety. Recognising that the target to reduce road deaths and serious injuries by 50% was not met in the First Decade of Action for Road Safety (Decade of Action) 2011–2020, the UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development made a pledge in September 2019 to make the new decade one of action and delivery. On 28 October 2021, the Global Plan for the Decade of Action for Road Safety 2021–2030 (the Global Plan) was launched to guide Member States in the implementation of key actions to improve road safety with the target to reduce road traffic deaths and injuries by at least 50% by 2030 (WHO & UN Regional Commissions, 2021).

The Global Plan calls on governmental agencies as the primary responsibility holder in delivering a safe road

transport system and implementing the required road safety actions to achieve the global target of 50% reduction in deaths and injuries by 2030. The Global Plan also calls on other actors — nongovernment organisations (NGOs), academia, youth, funders, private sector and UN agencies — as important contributors. NGOs are groups organised independently from governments at a local, national or international level to serve a certain cause such as road safety. NGOs exist to drive actions and bring improvements on a societal issue, and, in the field of road safety, NGOs drive road safety actions to protect people from being killed or seriously injured in our ubiquitous use of the road transport system.

The Global Alliance of NGOs for Road Safety (the Alliance) is a member-based organization for NGOs working for road safety around the world and currently represents 288 NGO members in 98 countries. The Alliance was founded in 2011 by NGO members of the United Nations Road Safety Collaboration (UNRSC) under the auspices of the World Health Organization (WHO) with a mission to unite, empower and strengthen civil society to stimulate collaborative advocacy, action and accountability

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for road safety. The Alliance achieves this by providing services to its members in three key areas: networking and sharing, advocacy and accountability, and capacity development.

The aim of this paper is to articulate the NGO response to the calls made in the Global Plan by analysing the current road safety context and what NGOs contribute to the 50% reduction target by 2030. The paper employs relevant literature and results of an online survey conducted by the Alliance to substantiate the analyses herein. This online survey was conducted 14 January – 3 February 2021 to collect NGO perspectives of the first Decade of Action in anticipation of the launch of the second Decade of Action (Alliance NGO survey). It was made available to the Alliance member NGOs in English, Spanish, and French. A total of 100 NGOs from 53 countries responded to this survey. Further details are available in the Alliance (2021).

Lack of political will for road safety delivery

Despite knowing during the first Decade of Action that globally we suffer nearly 1.3 million preventable deaths and an estimated 50 million injuries from road crashes each year (WHO, 2015; WHO, 2018), these unacceptable numbers remained largely unchanged (WHO & UN Regional Commissions, 2021). Though many countries and organisations have adopted a vision of zero deaths from road crashes, the number of deaths is nowhere near zero. Without serious actions, road crashes are set to cause a further estimated 13–17 million deaths and 500 million injuries during this new decade (WHO & UN Regional Commissions, 2021; Job, 2019). There are three key factors retarding the progress that we need to urgently make in road safety — all these are indicators of the levels of political will to deliver road safety. They are discussed below.

We know what works but we are not implementing it

Even though much is known about what works to reduce deaths and injuries from road crashes (evidence-based interventions), these interventions are not being implemented to the scale required to address the actual size of the deaths and injuries occurring from road crashes. We know safe speed limits are required for people to survive in a crash, yet speed limits are left too high on many roads (Power, 2019). We know speed-calming measures save lives and reduce injuries, but they are not commonly implemented across low- and middle-income countries (World Bank, 2020). Universal helmet laws for motorcycle riders work, but they have been repealed in a number of states in the USA (Peng et al., 2017). We know how to build five-, four- and three-star roads, yet 88% of a 358,000 km sample of roads across 54 countries found sampled roads were only one- or two-star rated for pedestrians

(iRAP, 2021). Lifesaving vehicle technologies such as Intelligent Speed Assistance (ISA) and Anti-Lock Brakes in Motorcycles (ABS) are available, yet they are resisted by the motor vehicle industry and not mandated to be part of all vehicles manufactured or driven in most countries (Ward, 2020). We know a legal breath alcohol (BAC) limit of .02 is better than .05 or .08, yet every state of USA has .08 except Utah which adopts .05 (FindLaw, 2021) and only 45 countries have adopted BAC limits of .05 for the general population and .02 for young or novice drivers (WHO, 2018). These are only some of the many examples of measures proven to save lives and injuries not being implemented.

Evidence-based interventions are not financed to the scale required

Verbal commitments that are not backed with financing to deliver them are not genuine commitments. The lack of funding towards the interventions known to work to save lives and serious injuries is well recognised as the core of the continuing road trauma experienced around the world (Wegman, 2015; Job, 2020). The Global Plan recognises that road safety is underfunded and a call for sustainable financing of road safety was made at the Supporting Event to the High-level Meeting (HLM) of the UNGA on Global Road Safety to be held in 2022 (UNGA, 2021). Some countries may report on the transport infrastructure spending — for example, the European Union reports that transport infrastructure investment represents around 1% of the GDP (Brendt et al., 2014). However, that does not necessarily mean such funding has road safety impact (i.e. death and injury reductions) because, for example, road surface improvements can generate increased vehicle speed, which directly increases the risks of deaths and serious injuries (Sekhar, et al., 2016).

As highlighted at the Supporting Event by Lotte Brondum, Executive Director of the Alliance, without public reporting of funding for road safety specifically, it is hard to make improvements in road safety investment (UNGA, 2021). In road safety, transparency in exactly what monetary value has been put towards specific interventions to reduce the number of deaths and injuries is lacking compared to other movements such as HIV, malaria, and tuberculosis (e.g. <https://data.theglobalfund.org/>). This lack of transparency in genuine road safety spending reflects the lack of genuine commitments to road safety.

In addition, funds are often misused on interventions which are not evidence-based, perpetuating the underfunding of evidence-based interventions. For example, evidence shows that school-based and post-licence driver/rider training and education at best make no difference to road safety outcomes and sometimes show worse outcomes, yet they continue to attract funding due to common sense beliefs and popularity rather than scientific evidence (Turner, et al., 2021; Ker et al., 2005; Ivers et al., 2016; Roberts and Kwan, 2001).

Decision makers evade taking responsibility for road safety

The Stockholm Declaration (2020) called for political commitment and responsibility at the highest level and governmental agencies to deliver the scale of efforts required at regional, national and sub-national levels to achieve SDG targets. In the Alliance NGO survey, the ‘lack of political will’, ‘lack of accountable focal point in government’, ‘lack of prioritization of road safety in government’ and ‘lack of political commitment’ were commonly cited by NGOs as hampering road safety delivery. In the Global Plan, governments (national, state and local) are clearly identified as the entity that bears the main responsibility to ensure people’s safety and to fund road safety activities. However, governments often evade taking responsibility for road safety and investing in system reforms by presenting the lack of safe road use by the people as the core of the road safety problem. The funding sits with the Heads of States, but, related to the point above, road safety continues to be underfunded often because governments do not take ownership of road safety.

For example, Transport for London (TfL) ran a campaign with the message “See Their Side. See safer roads.” It promoted to the community that we all need to play our part in making our streets safer because 71% of Londoners think road users are not as considerate as they should be (TfL, 2021). This presentation of road safety as a personal responsibility undermines public demand for a Safe

System that protects the road users and therefore political incentives to fund system reforms for road safety. Case studies in Nairobi, Mumbai and Bogota have shown road safety is generally perceived as a personal responsibility rather than something that could be influenced by government action (Overseas Development Institute, 2018). According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), an agency of the US Federal Department of Transportation, 94% of serious crashes are due to human error (NHTSA, n.d.). These often-quoted statistics mislead people to believe that safety interventions must fix the road users (e.g. via education) and that the responsibility of road safety largely falls on the individuals (Zipper, 2021). In some countries, the blame may even be made to an uncontrollable force such as fatalism (Kayani, et al., 2011) in addition to the road users. A senior official of the Federal Road Safety Corps of Nigeria recently attributed the deaths on the roads in Bauchi state to the handwork of the devil as well as claimed that “all the departments of the Road Corps are working for one goal which is to reduce road crashes, avoid deaths through accidents that are caused by negligence of the road users” (Vanguard, 2021). These claims absolve governments of responsibility for the unsafe road transport systems they provide.

Knowing what works, yet not implementing these interventions, knowing the continuing unacceptable numbers of deaths and injuries, yet not funding the measures that are known to save lives and injuries, and

Table 1. The roles of NGOs in the field of road safety as described in the Global Plan for the Decade of Action for Road Safety 2021–2030 (the Global Plan) and by NGOs (Alliance NGO survey).

The Global Plan	Alliance NGO survey
“Civil society can help amplify the voice of academia by being an advocate and acting as an independent voice to influence social change.”	“advocacy” “Ensure evidence-base” “Bring change”
“support the development of policies by augmenting the evidence base as well as bringing the perspectives of communities impacted by those policies to the table.”	“participate in decision making” “data collection, research, monitoring & evaluation” “support, empower and include victims in road safety actions”
“help ensure government accountability by empowering communities on road safety issues and ensuring good governance” “help push for the achievement of the road safety related SDGs”	“hold governments accountable”
“keeping road safety on the government agenda and uniting stakeholders with a common goal”	“influence government” “collaborations & partnerships with other stakeholders”
“be an important source of road safety information for the community and governments”	“community & government education”

continuing acceptance that road safety is a personal responsibility rather than a system designer responsibility all reflect the deep lack of political motivation to address the road safety problem. As Viviam Perrone, representative of Asociación Madres del Dolor, highlighted at the Supporting Event to the HLM on Global Road Safety, “we need the political will” (UNGA, 2021).

Power of NGOs in road safety

Genuine commitments to road safety delivery are demonstrated by funds allocated to and spent on measures that are known to work in saving lives and injuries. NGOs play a key role in highlighting the accountability of decision makers who have the power to determine where funds go and how funds are spent. NGOs also play a key role in amplifying public demand for transparent, dedicated, impactful investments in road safety. Thus, NGOs increase motivation from governments and other critical decision makers to fund evidence-based road safety actions and act as a catalyst to genuine commitments to road safety delivery — that is, NGOs have the power to increase the political will for road safety delivery.

The Alliance has endorsed the Global Plan and is calling on governments to implement the evidence-based actions recommended, commit the resources needed to implement them, and involve NGOs in decision making. Since its launch on 28 October 2021, NGOs have taken the Global Plan to their decision makers at symbolic handover events to ensure that their governments are aware of the Global Plan and feel a pressure to respond by implementing evidence-based measures and accepting accountability to achieve the 2030 target to reduce road deaths and injuries by 50%. As of December 2021, NGOs have completed handovers of the Global Plan to their local decision makers in 35 countries. The Alliance will further support NGOs to follow up with their governments to share their local road safety plans for the new decade.

The important roles NGOs play is also articulated in the Global Plan, which is broadly consistent with the ways the NGOs themselves described them in the Alliance NGO survey (see Table 1). Acknowledging these roles of NGOs, there are many ways the NGOs contribute to the 50% reduction target by 2030. These are discussed in turn below.

Advocacy to drive the implementation and financing of evidence-based interventions

As summarised in Table 1, one of the key NGO roles that the Global Plan outlines is to foster evidence-led advocacy and policy development (e.g. ‘amplify the voice of academia by being an advocate’, ‘support the development of policies by augmenting the evidence base as well as bringing the perspectives of communities’). The NGOs may work more closely and collaborate with

academics who empirically identify effective solutions and strategies (evidence-based interventions). The accessibility to the knowledge of evidence-based interventions for real-world implementation will be important for NGOs to readily advocate for such interventions. The Alliance may therefore assist NGOs to prioritise their advocacy for evidence-based interventions by providing a ready list of those which research has shown to reduce deaths and injuries. The Alliance may also support NGOs to follow an advocacy journey towards obtaining genuine commitments from decision makers and actualisation of those commitments (i.e. implementation and financing of evidence-based interventions). The Alliance may also strengthen its research activities. For example, the Alliance helped bring the perspectives of communities and highlight the devastating impacts of road crashes on community members via the People’s Survey which received responses from 5,606 people from 132 countries (The Alliance & Accountability International, 2020). The People’s Survey results were used to call on decision makers for urgent actions at the 3rd Global Ministerial Conference on Road Safety in February 2020. The Alliance will conduct a research project funded by the Global Road Safety Facility in partnership with the Milken Institute School of Public Health of the George Washington University and local NGOs in Cameroon, Kenya and Rwanda, to assess the enablers of implementing 30 km/h urban speed zones and support advocacy and policy change.

Holding decision makers accountable for road safety delivery

As summarised in Table 1, another key NGO role the Global Plan outlines is ensuring accountability and governance (e.g. ‘help ensure government accountability’, ‘ensuring good governance’, ‘keeping road safety on the government agenda’, ‘help push for the achievement of the road safety related SDGs’). The NGOs may more strongly challenge the communications of road safety as a personal responsibility and instead bring attention to governments’ responsibilities in providing a safe road transport system. The NGOs may ask governments to report on the specifics of government spending on road safety and its impact in terms of saving lives and injuries (e.g. funds made available to road infrastructure designed to save lives and injuries rather than simply road maintenance to assist purely travel speed). The NGOs may also ask and track governments to demonstrate genuine commitments by putting finance towards implementation of evidence-based interventions.

The NGOs may play a role in holding other entities to account such as the private sector such as the motor vehicle manufacturers to ensure the vehicles on our roads are safe and clean, as highlighted by David Ward, President of the Towards Zero Foundation at the Supporting Event to the HLM (UNGA, 2021). While there are NGOs who already dedicate their advocacy to the private sector, governments

still hold the power to legally regulate the private sector via laws and regulations, making holding governments accountable still relevant. In addition, we need to be mindful that holding non-state actors accountable for road safety does not act as another defence mechanism for governments to absolve themselves of responsibility. The Alliance has been supporting NGOs to push their local and national governments to make meaningful and specific commitments and track them via the #CommitToAct campaign (The Alliance, 2019). This has been developed by the Alliance for its member NGOs to call on their local decision makers to make commitments to act. The Alliance may further assist NGOs to track government activities beyond commitments (i.e. implementation) and reflect evidence, as well as track activities of other vital decision makers through an accountability tool.

Empowering communities to demand a Safe System

As summarised in Table 1, another key NGO role that the Global Plan outlines is empowering communities (e.g. ‘be an important source of road safety information for the community and governments’, ‘influence social change’, ‘uniting stakeholders with a common goal’). NGOs work for the people and put the value of human life at the core of road safety. When using the road transport system, we want people to be able to travel without being killed or seriously injured, and therefore not suffer the negative consequences of deaths and serious injuries, such as grief, pain, psychological suffering, loss of livelihoods and other negative impacts on quality of life. A Safe System is a road transport system that allows people to travel without being killed or seriously injured. This people-centred advocacy for a Safe System is what makes NGOs call for evidence-based interventions, which research has shown to prevent/reduce deaths and serious injuries. This people-centred advocacy for a safe road system also reminds the governments and the communities that it is the governments’ role to supply a Safe System rather than individual community members’ responsibility to keep ourselves safe. The NGOs can bring relevant information to inspire and empower communities to demand governments to supply a Safe System for the people (Job and Sakashita, 2012). The community demand creates the political incentives to deliver road safety and NGOs work to bring these community perspectives to the governments. For example, an NGO in India (Patiala Foundation <http://patialafoundation.org/frontend/web/>) sought road user data (showing almost half of the population in Patiala walks or cycles to work daily and only 6% used cars) and brought forward online petitions collected from the local communities to the local authorities – as a result, roads are being reconstructed to include pedestrian facilities in Patiala (The Alliance, 2020). The political incentives may be further increased by NGOs working with the media. For example, an NGO in Tunisia (Les Ambassadeurs de la Sécurité Routière <http://www.asr.tn/>) worked closely with

the media to put pressure on the Ministry of Transport to enforce the national seat belt legislation (The Alliance, 2021).

Need for greater meaningful NGO participation

According to the 2021 NGO survey, 76.8% of NGOs are already actively engaging with government authorities. In addition to appropriate knowledge and skills within the NGOs, meaningful participation was identified as the second highest enabler of contributing to the Decade of Action and SDGs in the last decade. Furthermore, other than lack of funding of NGOs (72% of survey respondents identified this as a factor), a lack of a road safety accountable focal point in government (55%) and lack of NGO meaningful participation (32%) were identified as possible factors hampering NGO contributions to the global road safety targets in the new decade.

While advocacy was identified as one of the top areas of NGO capacity growth in the past decade (89% of respondents said the Alliance contributed to NGO growth in advocacy), only 67% of respondents said the Alliance contributed to NGO growth in meaningful participation, and 55% of respondents said they need capacity development support in meaningful participation to help improve NGO contributions to the global targets in the new decade. In response, the Alliance developed a *Good Practice Guide: Meaningful NGO Participation* (2021) and held capacity development training on meaningful NGO participation in October 2021.

Meaningful NGO participation occurs when NGOs participate in a decision-making space on behalf of the communities they represent and in a way that leads to actions that result in the reductions (and possibly ultimately elimination) of deaths, serious injuries and related psychological suffering from road crashes (The Alliance, 2021). NGO case studies suggest that NGOs who meaningfully participate in a decision-making space keep their focus on bringing positive outcomes and reduced suffering for the communities, seek and use data and evidence to develop their advocacy messages and strategies, actively seek out opportunities they can leverage to amplify their demands, persist despite obstacles and deliver a track record of effective work, identify and approach relevant stakeholders to work with, and use effective communication strategies (The Alliance, 2021). In order for NGOs to have influence at the decision-maker levels, governments and other decision makers must also allow NGOs to participate in decision making. These enabling environments for meaningful NGO participation may be created and enhanced with the mutual understanding between decision makers and NGOs of the importance of NGO involvements in decision-making. As a way to help generate research-based guidance on the enabling environment of NGOs, the Alliance in

partnership with the Milken Institute School of Public Health of the George Washington University and local academic institutions in Ethiopia, Uganda and Zambia, a research project funded by UK Aid via the Global Road Safety Facility, is underway.

Conclusion

People are being killed or seriously injured in our ubiquitous use of the road transport system around the world. Knowing the continuing unacceptable numbers of deaths and injuries, yet not implementing or funding the measures that are known to save lives and injuries with continuing acceptance that road safety is a personal responsibility rather than a system designer responsibility, all reflect the deep lack of political will to address the road safety problem. Genuine commitments to road safety delivery are demonstrated by funds allocated to and spent on measures that are known to work in saving lives and injuries. Decision makers have the power to determine where funds go and how funds are spent and greater transparency in impactful investments in road safety is needed. NGOs have the power to increase the political will through three key roles: 1) Advocacy to drive the implementation and financing of evidence-based interventions; 2) Holding decision makers accountable for road safety delivery; and 3) Empowering communities to demand a Safe System. In order for NGOs to have influence at the decision-maker levels, governments and other decision makers must also allow NGOs to participate in decision making. NGOs are needed to deliver the target of reducing road traffic deaths and injuries by at least 50% by 2030.

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