

DESIGNING A CITY FOR PEDESTRIANS

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia



Photo source: Amanuel Tsegaye

Introduction

In 2018, then Head of Addis Ababa's Traffic Management Agency, Jiregna Hirpa, helped kickstart a car-free day programme called Menged Le Sew.

Today, 23 streets of different lengths across the city are closed weekly or monthly and local government continues with its plans to build a pedestrian friendly city through the programme, as well as with infrastructure and policy.

According to Jiregna, who is now a Transport Planner at WRI Africa, the past four years have seen a reduction of 4% in road incidents in Addis Ababa.

Adapting a Global South concept

Inspired by [Bogota's Ciclovía](#) programme which creates a network of car-free streets across Colombia's capital, efforts to roll out Open Streets programmes in African cities can be traced back to the early 2000s.

In 2018, a group of city officials and civil society actors convened at the [Open Streets exchange for African Cities](#) in Cape Town to share experiences and ideas to implement programmes in more cities. As in Addis Ababa, different cities have adapted the model to their own contexts.

Jiregna says the idea for a programme materialised through the Cape Town exchange of 2018, where he met Ethiopian activist [Seble Samuels](#). Back in Addis Ababa, together, with other city units and under the patronage of Ethiopia's Minister of Health, they kicked off the programme by doing it in six locations across the city.

This strongly aligned with the government's agenda to shift away from the city's vehicle-centred design.

Indeed, alarmed by the data that was showing more than 80% of the fatalities were pedestrian, Jiregna helped to develop and launch a road safety strategy in 2017.

In addition to prioritising investment in infrastructure and signalling, Jiregna connected with civil society actors who, aware of the importance of shifting perceptions amongst policy makers, practitioners and residents, joined forces to test the concept of Car Free days.

How it works

Menged Le Sew (translated from Amharic as 'streets for the people') focuses on mobility and cycling, as well as pedestrian safety, but the diverse benefits of the programme became evident from the early days.

Jiregna explains that "for us it was road safety and promoting non-motorised transport, but it was also about emissions reduction, active lifestyles for residents and creating a healthy city as a whole".

Menged Le Sew is supported and sanctioned by local government. They invest in the infrastructure and logistics and have made a commitment to sustaining it. Jiregna highlights that this political will has been critical. Though they rely on partnerships and support from local and international actors, it is fundamentally a government-led programme.



“We were lucky because we had the passion, the commitment, the right institution and got the budget,” he asserts.

At the same time, they started at iconic places and grew it incrementally, both in terms of frequency and geographic spread.

Residents who live near the street closures get activated on a regular basis and have come to expect it. In fact, on a few occasions when the road barriers have not been put in place by the City, they have done it themselves.

What is the impact?

The achievements of such a programme can be catalytic. For example it has contributed to the roll-out of other interventions which directly impact pedestrian safety.

For instance, the municipality implemented speed management measures and widened sidewalks throughout the city.

As Jiregna explains, “we are observing a consistent reduction in road traffic fatalities. This is not exactly attributed to car-free days, but the holistic measures that are influenced by this initiative are helping to build a pedestrian friendly city.”

Moreover, the less quantifiable results include social cohesion. Watching children with their parents on their streets unafraid and free is a demonstration of what the city should always look like, he says.

Photo source: Addis Traffic Management Authority

