

Introduction

Providing effective post-crash care is an essential part of the Safe Systems approach endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly. Kigali shows how collaboration between government and civil society can provide the skills needed to turn it into reality.

Innocent Nzeyimana, a medical doctor by training, is the president of Healthy People Rwanda (HPR), an NGO founded in 2013. The organization is a consortium member of the EU-funded Trans Safe project that works with selected African cities to develop demonstration actions to test “innovative approaches to sustainable road safety development”.

HPR is involved in interventions that include data collection, as well as safe school zones and vehicles; but the one Innocent is most excited about is the training of police to support medical personnel on post-crash measures, which is part of the work they are doing with Trans Safe.

Partnering with others

The Rwanda Biomedical Centre, is the country’s health implementation agency and in recent years has invested in more ambulances responding to crashes.

Better post-crash response

Kigali, Rwanda



Photo source: Healthy People Rwanda

However, according to Innocent, the country is above the global standard waiting time, mainly because of challenges such as inadequate infrastructure.

Innocent explains that in Rwanda, the police are often first to arrive at road crashes sites, and the extra time it takes for an ambulance to arrive costs lives. When they arrive, the police officers are wary to help, and without any training often aggravate the situation by moving people inappropriately or not communicating clearly to medical professionals.

Maximising resources

Innocent and his team are determined to capacitate as many people as possible by incorporating this skills development into standard police training programmes as well as within the national education curriculum in high schools.

Innocent's team realized that Providing police officers with basic first aid skills would significantly reduce poor or delayed post-crash response and save lives.

The aim, Innocent explains, is to help save lives and provide the training resources that can “ensure it is not an additional burden on government”.

In Rwanda, road safety is managed at a national level, therefore Innocent has worked with his team to engage with the national road safety committee as well as with the Kigali municipality who have welcomed the training offering.

With the support of external partners, the programme has been evaluated and documented thus establishing an increase in knowledge and confidence. He says that all trainees reported using their skills to “perform techniques for bleeding control”.

Training to save lives

Since the beginning of the programme in May 2023, more than 800 police officers have been trained and 24 schools have participated, with more than 12 000 students in the past academic term.



Innocent Nzeyimana at a public event
Photo source: Healthy People Rwanda

The training programme has been rolled out in various forms. In addition to training police officers, it is common to see the HPR team carrying out emergency training to traffic police officers, at local schools or in collaboration with the municipality to provide first aid training to the public during Kigali's Car-Free Days.

The curriculum includes Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) and other techniques such as applying a tourniquet; wound packing, immobilization for fractured limbs and bleeding control. Innocent's team has also packaged a tailor-made "stop the bleed" curriculum for high school students.

Innocent explains that post-crash training has been welcomed by the police department and other governmental institutions who want it to be expanded.

The challenge, he remarks is working within existing constraints. To roll out more training, they need materials such as gloves and tourniquets, and while they have champions inside government, additional funding is often simply not available.

In the end, Innocent's team is working with what they have while adapting the programme to local needs. In addition to translating the original international curriculum into Kinyarwanda, they shortened some of the theoretical parts so that it would fit within the departments' timelines, while continuing to adapt it as they collect feedback from trainees.



Police undergoing training
Photo Source: Healthy People Rwanda