

Road safety made personal, local and real: the Global Alliance of NGOs for Road Safety - an umbrella for nongovernmental organisations

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Abstract

Nongovernmental Organisations (NGOs) are a key part of the road safety equation: They make the issue personal, local and real. NGOs are instrumental in generating a demand from the public and from governments for safer roads, and when they base their interventions on evidence about what works, they can contribute in significant ways to saving lives. Strong NGO participation is essential to achieve the global targets for increasing road safety and reducing road fatalities.

With 170-plus member NGOs active in more than 80 countries, the Global Alliance of NGOs for Road Safety (the Alliance) was founded in response to demand from NGOs worldwide for a forum where they could share best practices and collectively advocate for road safety and the rights of victims of road traffic injury.

The Alliance provides concise information about the activities of NGOs to non-NGO actors, including governments, foundations, intergovernmental agencies, the media, and other stakeholders with an interest in road safety. The Alliance also coordinate and mobilise activities aligned with the Decade of Action 2011–2020 and the Sustainable Development Goals. This involves the Global Meeting of Nongovernmental Organizations Advocating for Road Safety and Road Victims, which takes place every two years; regular communications and outreach; and mobilisation of ongoing responses to the Global Plan for Road Safety.

Around the world, NGOs are acting as advocates and implementers of road safety programs and activities. NGOs are often set up by citizens in response to a need they see around them. NGOs fill the gap in government programmes, and can influence decision making.

The Global Alliance and its member NGOs are at the forefront of the global effort to save lives on the roads.

Introduction

Each year, more than 1.2 million people die on the world's roads, and tens of millions are seriously injured. Road traffic crashes are currently the number one killer of young people aged 15–29. As countries develop and acquire ever more motorised vehicles, road traffic crashes are projected to become the seventh leading cause of death globally by 2030 (WHO, 2015).

Alongside the devastation that road traffic crashes impose on victims' families and loved ones, they also take a tremendous toll on the economy. Each year, developing countries lose up to 5% of their gross domestic product (GDP) (WHO, 2015) owing to medical costs, productivity losses, and other expenses resulting from deaths and injuries on the road, which is more than most of them receive in development aid.

These consequences are preventable, and NGOs play a critical role in addressing these issues and reducing the impact of road traffic crashes around the world.

History: the road to the Alliance

In May 2009 in Brussels, Belgium, the World Health Organization (WHO) brought together for the first time 70 NGOs working on road safety in 40 countries. The mission was to discuss how NGOs can help advance the road safety agenda, and the outcome was the Brussels Declaration, which is the compilation of 33 recommendations to governments that formed the framework for the Decade of Action 2011–2020.

This first meeting showcased civil society's importance in reaching the Decade of Action goals. In 2010, WHO asked nine United Nations Road Safety Collaboration (UNRSC) members to explore the possibility of an alliance of road safety NGOs. The group conducted a survey among road safety NGOs where 89% indicated that a lead NGO-coordinating body would be useful. WHO subsequently created a steering committee to move forward with the idea. The founding assembly took place in 2012, and the new alliance was named the Global Alliance of NGOs for Road Safety. Soon thereafter, the organisation's bylaws and Strategic Plan for 2014–2018 were established.

The Alliance is governed by a five-person board of directors and recruited its first staff in late 2014. The Alliance is registered as a tax-exempt organisation with a seat in Zurich, Switzerland, under Swiss Civil Code article 60. The Alliance's highest authority is the General Assembly, where each NGO Alliance member has one vote. The General Assembly is held every two years.

What does a road safety NGO look like?

As of May 2016, the Alliance has a total of 178 members in 81 countries. Table 1 shows the geographical distribution of the members and it can be seen that most members are located in Europe, followed by Africa. Fewest members are found in Eastern Mediterranean region.

The Alliance have most members in India, Kenya and Nigeria. However, the majority of Alliance member NGOs (60%) are the only road safety NGO operating in their country. Late in 2015, the Alliance conducted a baseline survey to better understand the member base and its characteristics. Although the majority of road safety NGOs may be the only civil society road safety group in their country, the majority are affiliated across regional networks or with a specific interest group such as victim groups or children injury prevention groups. NGOs are founded in response to a need in their country; this could be an urge to do something about safe school routes, bad lighting at night, or seeking justice for the loss of a loved one. Alliance member NGOs are familiar with key road safety, health and development frameworks, such as the Global Plan and Sustainable Development Goals. For planning purposes, they use data from sources such as the WHO's Global Status Reports and national databases. NGOs have at least one staff member, although 27% are run by volunteers only. Funding is a major concern: 88% cite insufficient financial resources as their biggest challenge and only 14.1% of member NGOs have two or more years of funding available to cover operations.

The main funding source for 70.4% of Alliance members is private sector donations. Other significant sources of funding for Alliance members include international donors (35.2%), fees for products and services (29.6%) and local government contributions (26.8%).

Alliance role in supporting NGOs

The Alliance recruits members from all corners of the world and receives several applications per month. Applicants undergo a thorough assessment to ensure they are registered NGOs, active in the field of road safety, implementing activities, willing to share their ideas, and a proactive part of the road safety movement.

To support the members, the Alliance work in three areas: networking and sharing, advocacy, and capacity building. Examples of our work in these areas follow.

Networking and sharing

Given its central position, the Alliance plays a unique role in providing timely information to all members through different channels, including personal outreach, websites, newsletters, and social media.

The Alliance provides information about global campaigns and events such as United Nations Road Safety Week, launch of the Global Status Report, #SaveKidsLives, and the World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims. Also grant opportunities, the latest research on road safety, and best practices are shared frequently. New Alliance members are introduced to the community to ensure that NGOs working in the same field connect and collaborate. The website has recently been updated, and each member has a profile page. In addition, the Alliance issues regular e-newsletters to more than 1100 partners and advocates working in road safety around the world. In 2015, the newsletters included important updates on the Second Global High-Level Conference on Road Safety in Brazil and served as one of the event's central information sources.

Global meetings

Among other activities, every two years the Alliance produces a global meeting of road safety NGOs in collaboration with the WHO. To date these meetings have been held in Belgium, the United States, Turkey and Morocco. The Fourth Global Meeting of NGOs Advocating for Road Safety and Road Victims was hosted by the Moroccan National Committee for Traffic Accident Prevention, in Marrakech, Morocco. The meeting was attended by 201 delegates from more than 52 countries. The meeting featured a poster exhibition for member NGOs to share best practices; panel discussions on key road safety topics with experts from the World Bank, WHO, and other organisations; two capacity-building workshops on fundraising, project monitoring and evaluation for member NGOs; and the second General Assembly for members to vote on bylaws and elect the Alliance Board of Directors.

Advocacy

In collaboration with FIA Foundation, the Alliance co-launched the official UN Road Safety Week campaign, #SaveKidsLives, in November 2014. The #SaveKidsLives campaign is an international initiative mobilising hundreds of NGOs, governments, and other road safety advocates to educate their communities about the unacceptable number

Table 1. Geographic distribution of Alliance members

Africa	Americas	Eastern Mediterranean	Europe	South and East Asia	Western Pacific
25%	21%	6%	30%	9%	8%

Note: Regional distribution according to WHO's geographical definition

of young lives affected by road traffic crashes. Under the #SaveKidsLives campaign, local advocates helped to gather hundreds of thousands of signatures for the Child Declaration on Road Safety, which, from the perspective of a child, urges world leaders to take road safety seriously and make it a priority in the post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda. The Alliance was instrumental in collecting the one million signatures in support of the Child Declaration that were handed over to global leaders at the Second Global High-level Conference in Road Safety, in Brazil in November 2015.

World Day of Remembrance

The annual World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims, established by the United Nations, is commemorated every year in November. The Alliance connects members around the world with international awareness activities and media materials so that they can promote the event in their countries, thereby raising awareness about the tragic toll that road traffic crashes take on loved ones and families.

Capacity building

NGOs around the world respond to the global road safety crises with different levels of human and financial resources, organisational capacities, and strengths. With the establishment of a permanent Secretariat in September 2014, the Alliance was able to provide direct assistance and technical support to member NGOs. The Alliance answers inquiries from hundreds of NGOs and connects them to services and partners that help them develop their programs and organisational capacity.

To help the Alliance support members in reaching their fullest potential, the Alliance launched the Alliance Empowerment Program during an NGO rally leading up to the Second Global High-Level Conference on Road Safety in Brasilia, Brazil in November 2015.

The Alliance Empowerment Program conducts a range of capacity-building activities and training and mentor arrangements for members; such as webinars on risk areas, communication, advocacy, fundraising, and monitoring and evaluation.

Affiliations and partnerships

The founding of the Alliance was driven by the World Health Organization, who also served as secretariat until August 2014. The WHO also funded the first three Global Meetings and remains a close ally and friend of the Alliance; their advice and views are sought out on a regular basis.

In addition, the Global Road Safety Facility hosted by the World Bank is a long-time funder, supporter and friend. The Alliance and the FIA Foundation have partnered on numerous occasions, especially on UN Road Safety Week and mobilisation of the civil society. The Global Fund

for Road Safety (managed by the FIA Foundation and the WHO) is currently providing funding for the Alliance's implementation of its strategic plan and FedEx is providing funding for networking, sharing and capacity building efforts.

Moving forward

Alliance member NGOs are often set up by everyday citizens responding to needs they see around them. The Alliance support global road safety NGOs to fill government gaps and influence decision making through advocacy, awareness and education. The Alliance and its members play a vital role in the growing worldwide movement to reduce the devastating effects of traffic injuries. With interventions based on evidence for what works, Alliance member NGOs help save lives and the Alliance plays a unique, central role in mobilising and connecting NGOs and road safety stakeholders.

References

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