

Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, January 9 (Infosplusgabon) - Reducing road traffic deaths and injuries could result in substantial long-term income gains for low- and middle-income countries, according to a new World Bank study released on Tuesday.

The report, “The High Toll of Traffic Injuries: Unacceptable and Preventable,” funded by Bloomberg Philanthropies, has introduced a new global methodology to calculate the economic impact of road safety and analyses the cases of China, India, the Philippines, Tanzania and Thailand.

While there was general recognition of road traffic injuries and fatalities, little was known about the link between road traffic injuries and economic growth, the study pointed out, quantifying how investments in road safety are also an investment in human capital.

The study found that countries that do not invest in road safety could miss out on anywhere between 7 and 22% in potential per capita GDP growth over a 24-year period.

This requires policymakers to prioritize proven investments in road safety. The cost of inaction is more than 1.25 million deaths a year globally, diminished productivity and reduced growth prospects.

According to the report, road traffic fatalities disproportionately affect low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), where 90% of global road deaths occur. Rising incomes in many developing countries have led to rapid motorization, while road safety management and regulations have not kept pace.

Death rates from road traffic injuries are high in LMICs – in 2015, reaching 34 per 100,000 in the countries studied. By contrast, the average across the 35 countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in the same year was 8 deaths per 100,000.

The greatest share of mortality and long-term disability from road traffic crashes happen among the working-age population (between 15 and 64 years old).

According to the report, deaths and injuries from road traffic crashes affect medium- and long-term growth prospects by removing prime age adults from the work force, and reducing productivity due to the burden of injuries.

Using detailed data on deaths and economic indicators from 135 countries, the study estimated that, on average, a 10% reduction in road traffic deaths raised per capita real GDP by 3.6% over a 24-year horizon.

Over the period 2014-38, halving deaths and injuries due to road traffic could potentially add 22% to GDP per capita in Thailand, 15% in China, 14% in India, 7% in the Philippines and 7% in Tanzania.

In addition to the GDP gains from preventing death and injury, road safety interventions improve welfare benefits to the society.

The World Bank study has quantified these gains for the five countries using a range of income and risk reduction scenarios. Measured in 2005 US dollars, the welfare gains ranged between US\$5,000 to US\$80,000 in Tanzania, and between US\$850,000 to US\$1.8 million in Thailand.

To achieve these welfare gains the report has listed interventions that include reducing and enforcing speed limits, reducing driving under the influence of alcohol, increasing seat-belt use through enforcement and public awareness campaigns, and integrating road safety in all phases of planning, design, and operation of road infrastructure.

“Traffic crashes kill more than 1.25 million people around the world each year and they also take a huge economic toll, with so much human potential being lost. Investments in road safety pay for themselves many times over, and hopefully this new report will spur governments to take actions that save lives,” said Michael R. Bloomberg, philanthropist, three-term Mayor of New York City and entrepreneur.

“Inspired by disease impact studies, this it is one of the first systematic efforts to estimate both the potential economic benefits and aggregate social welfare gains of reducing road traffic injuries in low- and middle income countries,” said José Luis Irigoyen, World Bank Senior Director for Transport and ICT.

“Curbing road traffic injuries would not just be a victory for the transport sector but a significant milestone for global development, with immediate and far-reaching benefits for public health, wellbeing, and economic growth.”

Bloomberg Philanthropies Initiative for Global Road Safety has dedicated US\$259 million over 12 years to implement interventions that have been proven to reduce road traffic fatalities and injuries in low- and middle-income countries.

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