# HE DIED BECAUSE OF A POTHOLE



DR IAN CLARKE

On Friday last week, a young man named O'Brien Tindimwebwa was meeting a friend in Mengo, and since the traffic was heavy, he decided to ride his motorcycle. He was an experienced rider, having ridden all around Africa with the Uganda Bikers Association and was following a friend along the Balintuma Road at 8.00pm.

Since it was dark, and he was not familiar with this road, he failed to see a deep pothole and fell off. His friend realised what had happened and came back to find him lying in the pothole. At this point, he was conscious but had sustained rib injuries, and with the help of a passing motorist, they were able to take him immediately to Mengo Hospital.

Unfortunately, when he fell, one of his ribs had punctured his lung, so he was becoming increasingly short of breath. The doctors did an emergency procedure to drain the blood and air from the lining of the lungs, but they were unable to save him. He was 44 years old, with his life in front of him, but died because of a pothole.

I have written constantly over the past two decades about potholes, but this young man still paid with his life for our collective failure to fix them. He is not the only person who has died because of potholes, and a quick scan on Google will yield multiple incidents of motorcycle guys who have died, often because a motorist swerves to avoid one. Do these deaths not make anyone – a politician, an engineer, the mayor, the ED, or one of the numerous ministers for Kampala – want to take responsibility to fix this problem of potholes? Or does everyone feel that it is someone else's responsibility? Does anyone have the mentality that 'The buck stops here?'

When the Kiteezi garbage tip collapsed and killed scores of people, no single person took responsibility and everyone blamed someone else, but it is exactly this failure to take individual responsibility that leads to these disasters happening again.

Our system is broken: the 'technical people' wait on the politicians to set priorities and release money, while the politicians do not realise the critical role they could play in lobbying for funding and ensuring basic needs are met. Essentially, no one feels passionate enough to take decisive action.

It is the local authority (in this case Kampala Capital City Authority – KCCA), which is responsible for the maintenance of roads in the city. However, KCCA depends on the central government for a large part of its budget. When budgeting season comes around, KCCA puts in its request, which will automatically be cut down by the ministry of finance, but even that smaller budget may be dispersed late.

Hence KCCA are left with an inadequate budget for necessities such as road maintenance, and even when the money is released there are cumbersome procedures to follow, such as the award of framework contracts and selection of suppliers. It is, therefore, accepted by those in the system that because finances will be inadequate and materials in short supply, the work will proceed in a stop-start manner. This is all taken as normal, and the politicians, the ED and ministers accept this. Consequently, when another person dies, no one thinks it is their fault – the buck does not stop anywhere, it just goes round and round.

What fuels this system is that even though the politicians are being paid handsomely, they dissociate from taking any responsibility for what is on the ground, while the engineers sit around and wait for allocation of funds. It is not that people do not care, it is that they are part of a system where no one has to take personal responsibility. Everyone gets a lucrative salary, but no one has to take responsibility for the poor results.

In the case of medical negligence, one can sue the individual doctor and the hospital. If the engineer, town clerk or mayor responsible, plus the institution (KCCA) were sued, perhaps this might introduce some accountability. If no one inside the political structure is prepared to take responsibility, then citizens themselves should rise in protest and put KCCA and our public servants to task.

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