

'Unwritten' rules of driving in Kampala

If you really want to learn how to drive in Kampala, forget the Highway Code for a moment. There's another syllabus — one that isn't printed, tested, or approved anywhere, yet is practised daily on our roads. You know it. I know it. We all survive by it.

Welcome to the "unwritten rules of driving in Kampala." Rule Number One: Indicators are decorative lights. Rule Number Two: The bigger the car, the smaller the responsibility. Rule Number Three: If there is a jam, create a new lane. Even if it's a pavement. Even if it's someone's garden.

We laugh because it's true. But it is also tragic. Every day on our roads, irony has replaced order. We have turned traffic into a competition of boldness instead of a system of cooperation. The most aggressive driver wins. The most patient driver loses. And the pedestrian? They pray.

We joke that in Kampala, zebra crossings are just road art. That traffic lights are suggestions. That boda bodas have

not helping the government — you are protecting your future hospital bills. When you respect a pedestrian crossing, you are not being weak — you are choosing not to live with someone's blood on your conscience. When you keep your lane, you are reducing the chaos that might trap you in the very jam you are trying to escape. Safe driving is not a favour to others. It is an investment in your own life.

When we drive carelessly, we reduce human beings to obstacles. We stop seeing people and start seeing delays. Yet the same road that makes us impatient today might carry our own family tomorrow.

If we want safer roads, the change cannot start only with enforcement. It must start with mindset. With the simple decision to stop treating driving as a battlefield.

But responsibility does not end with drivers. We cannot talk about discipline on roads that sometimes look like obstacle courses. We cannot preach patience where traffic lights don't work, road signs are missing, streetlights are broken, and potholes compete with vehicles for space.

When infrastructure is poor, chaos becomes the default language of the road. Clear signage, working traffic lights, proper pedestrian walkways, visible road markings, and well-designed junctions are not luxuries. They are life-saving tools. Every faded zebra crossing and every unlit highway at night silently contributes to the accidents we later blame on careless drivers.

Government must understand: Road safety is not only enforced — it is engineered. Build roads that guide behaviour, not roads that test survival instincts.

Maybe it's time we rewrite these unwritten rules. What if the new rules were just as contagious? Indicate early. Arrive late, but arrive alive. A pedestrian crossing is not paint. It is priority. It may not sound dramatic. It may not feel sharp. But it saves lives — possibly your own.

In the end, road safety is not about being perfect drivers. It is about being responsible human beings in control of powerful machines. Because when one person is safe on the road, society is safer. And when we all drive like our lives depend on it — they actually do.

Maybe it's time we retire these unwritten rules.



Meddie Musisi
Road safety

diplomatic immunity. But behind every joke is a hospital bed, a grieving family or a life permanently altered.

Somewhere along the way we confused recklessness with intelligence. A driver who squeezes through impossible gaps is called "sharp". One who speeds through traffic is "experienced". One who ignores right of way is "confident". But let's be honest: That is not skill. That is gambling — with human lives.

Road safety is not about pleasing traffic police. It is not about avoiding fines. It is not about passing a driving test and forgetting everything the next day. Road safety is self-protection.

When you slow down, you are

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