

# Vision Zero implementation in Africa

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## Background

The concept of Vision Zero was launched at the World Safety Congress in Singapore in 2015. It is a campaign that promotes a mindset that all workplace injuries and work-induced ill health are preventable. The high note of the launch was the presentation and story shared by Michael Lopez-Alegria, a former commander of the International Space Station. The bottom line was that there is a shift to the culture of prevention, which was clearly supported with the Vision Zero 7 Golden Rules.

I recall walking up to the (then) Secretary General of the International Social Security Association (ISSA), Hans-Horst Konkolewsky, to congratulate him on the very successful launch of the Vision Zero campaign and the need for us to take the campaign to Africa. I asked for any left-over materials from the launch to be sent to us in Africa for both regional and country-level launches. Not too long after the meeting, I received Vision Zero flags and badges in Lagos, Nigeria. National and enterprise launches of Vision Zero were held across all regions of the world. Currently, the Vision Zero 7 Golden Rules are being translated from English into 11 other languages.

## Vision Zero in Africa

The conversation in Singapore gained momentum in Africa with correspondence between several governments' health and safety agencies and institutions, individual health and safety practitioners, and the ISSA. These interactions led to the following launches:

- African Vision Zero regional launch in Abidjan, Cote D'ivoire, 28 April 2018
- Nigeria Vision Zero country launch in Lagos, Nigeria, 24 May 2018
- Ghana Vision Zero country launch in Accra, Ghana, 30 October 2018
- Zambia Vision Zero country launch in Livingstone, Zambia, 14 December 2018

A number of other countries showed interest in the launch of Vision Zero but the collective preparation towards the OSHAfrica International Conference in 2019 slowed the pace of individual country efforts. Shortly thereafter, the COVID-19 pandemic took the stage and our collective priorities shifted from the launch of Vision Zero to a response to the Pandemic. Countries like South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania, Senegal, Cameroon, and Zimbabwe are among those that were on the path of a national launch of Vision Zero before the outbreak of COVID-19.

While Vision Zero launches gained momentum in Africa, there was growth in daily applications to ISSA from health and safety practitioners across Africa waiting to be registered as Vision Zero trainers; this was an applaudable development. Several practitioners were using the ISSA materials to carry out Vision Zero training in African countries. Most organisations in Africa learned about Vision Zero through the coordinated efforts of these practitioners, attendance at the national Vision Zero launches, and/or through the efforts of the registered Vision Zero trainers.

## Enterprise and sectoral launches

While Vision Zero is structured through International, national, and enterprise approaches, innovation is an integral part of it, due to its inherent flexible nature. In Nigeria, the enterprise launch was a popular idea, but in Zambia, the sectoral approach was more popular. The two approaches have the same outcome in the long run.

Before the interruption of business processes that came with COVID-19, a few organisations had shown interest in Vision Zero enterprise launches in Nigeria. On 17 May 2019, the first enterprise launch of Vision Zero in Africa was successfully held by a Nigerian Government agency in charge of maritime operations across the country – the Nigeria Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA). The commitment shown by the leadership of this Agency, and their willingness to implement the 7 Golden Rules to achieve systems improvement, was impressive. Executive directors of the organisation witnessed the 'Vision Zero Oath of Safe Practice' by health and safety representatives in the Agency. This was a very colourful event that was reported in all national newspapers.

In Zambia, the sectoral launches of Vision Zero were led by the Workers' Compensation Fund Control Board (WCFCB). The sectoral launches that took place in Zambia before the COVID-19 outbreak were:

- Agricultural sector launch in Mkushi, Zambia – 28 August 2019
- Hospitality sector launch in Mfuwe, Zambia – 26 September 2019

The collective launches brought together all the players in these sectors who signed off Vision Zero implementation and the 7 Golden Rules. Zambia has taken the Vision Zero campaign a step further – to the education sector where many campaigns were launched in schools under the slogan 'Safe Workers of Tomorrow' (SWOT). The SWOT programme is designed to create health and safety education and awareness among children at primary and secondary school levels. Sectoral launches in Zambia that were prevented by the COVID-19 pandemic included:

- Small-scale mining sector
- Road and transportation sector
- Petroleum sector
- Water and sanitation sector

A resolution from the OSHAfrica International Conference 2019 in South Africa was to host an all-African Vision Zero event. Discussions with Prof. Kar-Heinz Noetal, President of ISSA Construction Section, at the ISSA Mining 50th Year Anniversary Event in South Africa, further helped to shape this idea. It evolved into the 'Vision Zero Africa Conference', which was held in November 2021 in Lagos, Nigeria; participants from 18 countries attended the conference. The conference will be held every two years in an African country. Zambia hosted the second conference on 7 and 8 September 2023. Uganda has secured the rights to host the 2025 conference.

## How has Vision Zero been implemented in Africa?

It is important to note that, at its launch, Vision Zero was first seen in Africa as a campaign. However, it evolved into a strategy. This transition helped the understanding of Vision Zero as a clear business strategy and not a campaign that would be replaced over time. The word 'strategy' was a game changer for Vision Zero as many business leaders and organisations related better to this word than 'campaign'. Business leaders and executives of organisations who have either attended Vision Zero launches and events, or sent delegates to attend these events, were more receptive and willing to embrace and implement Vision Zero.

The 7 Golden Rules is a catchy phrase that is relatable and defines the expectations of the Vision Zero strategy. In Zambia, for example, the company, Zambia Sugar, already had a programme called 'Target Zero' in place. For such corporations, it was easy to align their existing programmes with the Vision Zero strategy, using the 7 Golden Rules as guidance. Several other cities and countries in Africa had programmes that had 'Zero' in the names.

Noticeably, once organisations understood the concept behind the Vision Zero 7 Golden Rules, little convincing was needed. The organisations saw this as attractive and worth identifying with. Leadership commitment, which is the first Golden Rule, was easy to achieve in many organisations. This is the ideal place to start as the next steps needed for the implementation of the Vision Zero strategy follow from here. At the early stages of implementation, organisations' leaders were asked for written commitment, but there was reluctance and we stopped asking for this. Instead, efforts focused on showing organisations how the Vision Zero strategy could transform them.

### **Creative implementation of the Vision Zero 7 Golden Rules**

Vision Zero implementation across organisations is flexible. Although implemented differently, the outcomes are similar. Once commitment from leadership is achieved, any item within the 7 Golden Rules that they want to take as a next step is up to the organisation. Some organisations commit to all the seven rules at the same time, while others prefer to commit to a few at a time; once those first rules gain traction, the organisation takes up another rule. There have been cases where the rules 'Invest in people' and 'Improve competencies' have been merged into one item by an organisation in its commitment plan, and this works for those organisations. Mergers were motivated by the realisation that the organisation could not improve competencies without investing in people. In other words, they saw these as two closely related items, which they collapsed into one item, resulting in 6 Golden Rules. The outcome is the same.

Identifying targets is another item with which organisations easily relate in the implementation. We agree that this is something with which organisations may already be familiar, but they are now able to profile it as one of the requirements in the Vision Zero guiding principles. Now it is done with documentation, using pre-agreed-upon checklists. This is carried out as an organisation-wide programme, while units and departments independently conduct their routine hazards identification programmes. In Nigeria, after leadership commitment, NIMASA hired an external consultant to conduct fire risk assessments across their two operating facilities in Lagos to identify fire hazards, which are common in their operations. Consequently, there is improved incident reporting within these organisations, and they are beginning to use these data to implement corrective actions and set targets in areas needing attention.

The Vision Zero advocates, now known as the African Vision Zero Network, have closely supervised the activities of NIMASA since the enterprise launch of Vision Zero by their organisations, and have taken credible steps towards workplace health and safety improvement, using the Vision Zero 7 Golden Rules. At the time of the launch, the organisation did not have a defined health and safety department. Rather, there were pockets of health and safety activities scattered across several departments. But today, using the leadership commitment approach, they have created a complete health and safety department headed by a qualified health and safety practitioner in the capacity of a deputy director. This is

one of the achievements of the implementation of Vision Zero in this organisation. Since this development, much has been done in terms of capacity building in health and safety, and emergency responses. Recently, attempts have been made for a tele-medicine plan to support responses to cadet and crew members in vessels who may need support in Nigerian territorial waters. I understand that a draft document has been tabled for approval. There are discussions underway with the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) for training and certification of all employees of NIMASA, including cadets in training.

One item within the elements of the Vision Zero 7 Golden Rules that many African organisations found difficult to understand was Rule 5, which deals with ensuring safety and health in equipment and machines. Some organisations have existing systems, such as machine guarding and training employees on the safe use of these machines. We pointed out the need for safety in the procurement and supply chain. While many are still stuck trying to understand this new concept, we have been able to get the buy-in of some organisations, using the the following call to action: *"We should not purchase equipment or machines because they are cheap, we should purchase equipment and machines because they are safe."* They were able to relate to this and some even shared their experiences with procurement processes in the supply of not-fit-for-use personal protective equipment (PPE). Implementation of this rule has been slow due to bureaucracy, perceptions of job threat, and purchasing processes by supply chain managers.

Despite these challenges, we have seen some organisations design very smart health and safety programmes and events, and take advantage of established dates in the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and World Health Organization (WHO) calendars. They go beyond these dates and design their own programmes to speak to prevailing issues around health and safety within their workplaces. While there is room for improvement, it is important to recognise what organisations have achieved and to continue to encourage and remind them why they should keep at it.

### **The 2019 OSHAfrica Declaration**

The OSHAfrica Declaration of 2019 is a policy document that came out of the OSHAfrica Conference in South Africa. The document clearly emphasises the inherent benefits of the implementation of the Vision Zero 7 Golden Rules. These rules were tweaked to speak to African workplace health and safety realities. The call for workplaces to use this strategy for health and safety improvement was one of the high notes of the conference. We have since seen many health and safety professionals from several cities and countries in Africa calling for this document to use in their workplaces and to reference in their work.

Some of the highlights in the OSHAfrica recommendations of the Vision Zero 7 Golden Rules are:

- Promoting the need for visible actions from leadership – walking the talk
- Involving host communities in our overall health and safety programmes; and communities' participatory systems, which cover a large part of environmental health and safety
- Advocating for risk-based thinking and making workplace risk assessments gender sensitive and gender responsive, while considering intra-job variability and social contexts
- Emphasising evidence-based targets, with policies on implementation, enforcement, monitoring, and evaluation
- Consistently collecting occupational health and safety data at all levels (enterprise, country, and global)

- Developing occupational disease hazards surveillance systems with the intention of informing prevention and control measures
- Eliminating child labour, while promoting decent work
- Understanding human interaction with machines and the work environment, with a view of minimising risks
- Ensuring the use of safe equipment to reduce workplace hazards, as safe technology protects human capital
- Encouraging life-long learning from childhood (4–8 years) to adulthood.
- Promoting prevention by using pictorial images
- Instituting a culture of value for employees, and improving social interactions
- Changing the role of employees in occupational health and safety from passive to active
- Ensuring employees’ involvement in setting the stage for health and safety in workplaces

From these points, it is easy to understand where the creativity for the implementation of the Vision Zero strategy came from. What OSHAfrica did was simply to use the 7 Golden Rules to clarify contextual areas needing urgent attention, as seen in the case of child labour and gender inclusivity, which are two key issues confronting African workplaces. We also identified, earlier, a number of challenges faced by the implementation of the Vision Zero strategy.

### How are we evaluating the implementation of the Vision Zero 7 Golden Rules in Africa?

Evaluation is proving to be more difficult than expected, as most organisations are too busy to address it. Nevertheless, we are pushing forward and demanding data and reports to enable us to walk the organisations through the process. We are using the Proactive Leading Indicators document, published by ISSA (2020), to assist us in *measuring* health and safety outcomes. However, we are also seeing a number of other creative approaches for measuring the outcomes while using the 7 Golden Rules. These innovative approaches have given us further ideas on how to measure health and safety accomplishments, using the Vision Zero strategy.

A distinct assessment model was presented at the recently concluded Occupational Risk Prevention (ORP) Fundación Internacional Congress held in Bilbao, Spain from 26 to 28 April 2023. This model is already in use by Hitachi Rail in Japan. It appears to be an easy model to adopt and we are considering using it across workplaces where the Vision Zero strategy is in use in Africa. We are hopeful that, using this approach, we will be able to overcome the evaluation challenges, and be able to show empirical evidence for the positive outcomes of Vision Zero implementation in business in Africa. 📄

## UPCOMING EVENTS



**INTERNATIONAL**  
 34th ICOH International Congress  
 Marrakesh, Morocco  
 28 April - 30 May 2024  
 Website: <https://www.occhealth.co.za/pdf/ICOH2024FirstAnnouncement.pdf>

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**A-OSH EXPO South Africa**  
 Gallagher Convention Centre, Johannesburg  
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 Registration: <https://tickets.tixsa.co.za/event/a-osh-expo-south-africa-2024>

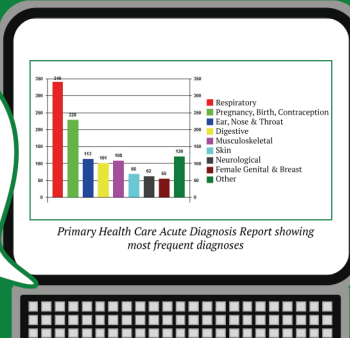
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