



**Cebit Cargo Ltd & another v Mutiso (Suing as the Personal Representative of the Late Felix Mulu Mutiso - Deceased) (Civil Appeal E012 of 2022) [2024] KEHC 6806 (KLR) (5 June 2024) (Judgment)**

Neutral citation: [2024] KEHC 6806 (KLR)

**REPUBLIC OF KENYA  
IN THE HIGH COURT AT VOI  
CIVIL APPEAL E012 OF 2022  
GMA DULU, J  
JUNE 5, 2024**

**BETWEEN**

**CEBIT CARGO LTD ..... 1<sup>ST</sup> APPELLANT**

**JOSHUA MBITHI NGUTU ..... 2<sup>ND</sup> APPELLANT**

**AND**

**MAGDALENE MUENI MUTISO (SUING AS THE PERSONAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE LATE FELIX MULU MUTISO - DECEASED) ..... RESPONDENT**

*(From the Judgment in Civil Case No. 242 of 2019 delivered on 28th February 2022 by Hon. A. M. Obura (Mrs.) (CM) at Voi Law Courts)*

**JUDGMENT**

1. In a judgment delivered on 28<sup>th</sup> February 2022, the learned trial Magistrate in Voi CMCC No. 242 of 2019 apportioned liability at 10%:90% in line with the decision in the test case Voi CMCC No. 243 of 2019 Njeri Wanjiru =Versus= Cebit Cargo Ltd and concluded as follows:-

“Reasons wherefore I hereby enter judgment for the plaintiffs as against the defendants jointly and severally:-

Pain and suffering Kshs. 20,000/=

Loss of expectation of life Kshs. 100,000/=

Loss of dependency Kshs. 2,512,389/60

Special damages Kshs. 69,700/=

Sub-total Kshs. 2,702,089/60



Less 10% contribution Kshs. 270,208/96

TOTAL Kshs. 2,431,880/64 (Two million four hundred and thirty one thousand, eight hundred and eighty shillings and sixty-four cents only.

The plaintiffs are also awarded costs of the suit and interest thereon at court rates. It is so ordered.”

2. Aggrieved by the decision of the trial court, the two appellants, who were the defendants in the trial court, have come to this court on appeal through counsel Musungu Pekke & Company Advocates, on the following grounds:-

1. That the Magistrate erred in law and fact in finding that the 2<sup>nd</sup> appellant was liable in causing the accident to the extent of 90% in respect of the road traffic accident which occurred on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2017 at Manyani area along Nairobi-Mombasa road involving the 1<sup>st</sup> appellant’s motor vehicle registration No. KAW 432E/ZC 5556 Mercedes Axor that was being driven by the 2<sup>nd</sup> appellant and motor vehicle registration No. KCT 189T Toyota Harrier that was being driven by one Martin Mbuta Mutua, now deceased when this was not obviously the case given the circumstances leading to the accident.
2. That the learned Magistrate erred in law and fact by failing to analyse facts and circumstances leading to the road traffic accident which occurred on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2017 which greatly pointed to huge contributory negligence on the part of the driver of motor vehicle Reg. No. KCT 189T Toyota Harrier and failed to apportion liability in the ratio of 50:50 as between the driver of motor vehicle Reg. No. KCT 189T Toyota Harrier and the 2<sup>nd</sup> appellant. The particulars of negligence against the driver of motor vehicle Reg. No. KCT 189T Toyota Harrier were:
  - i. Failing to slow, swerve, properly control motor vehicle Reg. No. KCT 189T Toyota Harrier or take any evasive measures to avoid the accident and or mitigate the injuries on a section of the road that was straight, flat and with no corners.
  - ii. Driving motor vehicle Reg. No. KCT 189T Toyota Harrier at high speed to the extent that he was unable to slow down and stop to avoid colliding head on with motor vehicle Reg. No. KAW 432E/ZC/5556 that was being driven by the 2<sup>nd</sup> appellant.
  - iii. Failing to heed the warning signs of the driver of motor vehicle Reg. No. KAW 432E/ZC/5556 which included hooting, flashing lights to alert him of the impending danger.
  - iv. Driving motor vehicle Reg. No. KCT 189T Toyota Harrier at high speed to the extent that after carelessly colliding with motor vehicle Reg. No. KAW 432E/ZC/5556 that was not in motion following a sudden engine failure, the said motor vehicle Reg. No. KCT 189T Toyota Harrier was pushed backwards by about 25 meters after the impact, a clear indication that it was being driven at high speed.
  - v. Driving motor vehicle Reg. No. KCT 189T Toyota Harrier while tired, fatigued and physically exhausted given the undisputed fact that the occupants of the said motor vehicle, including its driver had travelled on the night of 17<sup>th</sup> March 2017 from Mombasa to Kitui and arrived in Kitui on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2017 to attend a wedding ceremony. This is a clear indication that they travelled at night from Mombasa to Kitui, attended the wedding ceremony during the day on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2017 and travelled back from Kitui to Mombasa in the night of 18<sup>th</sup> March 2017 until the early morning hours of 19<sup>th</sup> March 2017 when the accident occurred.



- vi. Wilfully carrying excess passengers beyond the capacity of 5 passengers in motor vehicle Reg. No. KCT 189T Toyota Harrier.
3. That the learned Magistrate erred in law and fact by failing to hold that physical exhaustion, failing to heed the warning signs by the 2<sup>nd</sup> appellant on the impending danger, failing to stop, swerve or control his motor vehicle to avoid the accident, driving at high speed and careless driving on the part of the driver of motor vehicle Reg. No. KCT 189T Toyota Harrier were the major factors which made the late Martin Mbuta Mutua unable to carefully drive and control motor vehicle Reg. No. KCT 189T Toyota Harrier thus he was liable for the road traffic accident which occurred on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2017 to the extent of 50% in contributory negligence and liability.
4. That the learned Magistrate erred in law and fact by awarding excessive arbitrary and unjustifiable amount of quantum of loss of dependency amounting to Kenya Shillings Two Million Five Hundred and Twelve Thousand Three Hundred and Eighty Nine and Sixty Cents (2,512,389.60/=) only when the same was not proved at all as it is required by law.
5. That the learned Magistrate erred in law and fact by awarding the sum of Kshs. 2,512,389.60/= as quantum on loss of dependency when employment or monthly income of the deceased was not proved at trial on the balance of probability as it is required by law.
6. That by awarding the sum of Kshs. 2,512,389.60/= as loss of dependency for the estate of the deceased, the learned Magistrate arbitrary and unreasonably exercised her judicial discretion as no factual or documentary evidence had been presented before the trial court by the respondents to arrive at such an award.
7. That the learned Magistrate erred in law and fact by failing to appreciate and apply the principles set in law of what constitutes an income of an individual known as under the *Income Tax Act* whereby no tax returns were produced in court by the respondents to prove the deceased's net income.
8. That the learned Magistrate erred in law and fact in awarding special damages Kshs. 69,700/= that was not specifically pleaded and proved as required by law.
9. That the learned Magistrate erred in law and fact by disregarding the submissions and authorities cited by the appellants in support of their defence case and proceeded to award judgment in favour of the respondents.
10. That the quantum of damages is excessive, inordinately high and erroneous estimate of the damages awarded to the respondents with due regard to the weight and circumstances of the case.
11. The appellants shall cave leave of court to amend, add, alter and/or omit any ground on or before hearing hereof.
3. The appeal was canvassed through written submissions. In this regard, I have perused and considered the submissions filed by Musungu Pekke & Company Advocates for the appellants, as well as the submissions filed by Gitonga Muriuki & Company Advocates for the respondents.
4. This being a first appeal, I have a duty to reconsider all the evidence on record, re-evaluate the said evidence and come to my own findings bearing in mind though that I did not have the opportunity to hear and see witnesses testify to determine their demeanour and give due allowance for that – see *Selle =Versus= Associated Motor Boat Company Ltd (1968) EA 132*.



5. These appeals being in a series, I am informed that this appeal No. E006 of 2022 is the lead file. I note that in the other five appeals in the series also, the submissions were on both quantum of damages awarded, and on liability.
6. This court has already determined the issue of liability at 10%:90% in the lead appeal file – Voi High Court Civil Appeal No. E006 of 2022, and I thus adopt liability at 10%:90% in the present appeal. Thus my substantive considerations in this appeal will be limited to assessment of quantum of damages and costs.
7. This being a civil case, the standard of proof is on the balance of probabilities, see the English case of Miller =Versus= Minister of Pensions (1942) 2 ALL ER 372.
8. In proving their case at the trial in Voi CMCC No. 242 of 2019 the plaintiffs (now respondents) called one witness PW1 Magdalene Mueni Mutiso the mother of the deceased.
9. It was her evidence that deceased was aged 24 years, and was first born son. It was her evidence that he was employed by a relative Ndolo Mukami and used to send her money for maintenance and payment of school fees. She did not have documents to prove employment, but insisted that the deceased sent her Kshs. 10,000/= monthly.
10. Coming now to the issue of quantum of damages awarded, I have to remind myself that assessment of damages is an exercise of discretionary power by a trial court and that an appellate court will be slow to interfere unless certain parameters are satisfied. In this regard, I am of the view that it will suffice if I cite only the case relied upon by the appellants counsel herein – Kemfro Africa Ltd & Another =Versus= Lubia & Another (1985) eKLR wherein it was stated as follows:-

“The principles to be observed by an appellate court in deciding whether it is justified in disturbing the quantum of damages awarded by a trial Judge were held by the former Court of Appeal for Eastern Africa to be that it must be satisfied that either the Judge, in assessing the damages, took into account an irrelevant factor, or left out of account a relevant one, or that short of this, the amount is so inordinately low or so inordinately high that it must be a wholly erroneous estimate of the damage.”

11. I note that in submissions on appeal, the appellants counsel has disagreed with 36 years multiplier proposed as follows, on the basis of 30 years multiplier:-
  - Special damages Kshs. 69,700/=
  - Pain and suffering Kshs. 20,000/=
  - Loss of expectation of life Kshs. 100,000/=
  - Loss of dependency Kshs. 2,093,658/=
  - Sub-total Kshs. 2,084,280.80
  - Less 50% liability Kshs. 1,141,679/=
12. I note that in the judgment delivered on 28<sup>th</sup> February 2022, the trial Magistrate considered separately each head of award for damages. In that regard, I find no error committed by the trial court in assessing the quantum of damages for pain and suffering and for loss of life expectancy. I uphold the same.
13. With regard to the award for loss of dependency, the trial Magistrate applied the minimum wage for Mombasa. The major complaint of the appellants is that the trial Magistrate used a multiplier of 36 years, while they consider that a multiplier of 30 years is more appropriate.



14. In my view, since the general retirement age in Kenya is 60 years and there is no indication of ill health of the deceased young man, the trial court used the court's discretion within the law. I will uphold the award for loss of dependency.
15. As for special damages, I find no fault of misdirection committed by the trial court, as the Magistrate awarded what was pleaded and proved on the balance of probabilities.
16. I thus find no merits in the appeal. I dismiss the appeal. The appellants will pay jointly and severally the respondent's costs of the appeal.

**DATED, SIGNED AND DELIVERED THIS 5<sup>TH</sup> DAY OF JUNE 2024 IN OPEN COURT AT VOI VIRTUALLY.**

**GEORGE DULU**

**JUDGE**

In the presence of:-

Alfred/Trizah – Court Assistants

Mr. Were holding brief for Mr. Musungu for the appellant

Mr. Muriuki and Mr. Mbithi for the respondent

