



“Bicycle Ambulance? Why?”

The Need – Rural Transport

Transport costs, including the transport of emergency cases, put a strain on often already limited district health budgets, making emergency ambulance services difficult to sustain. Where free ambulance services are not available the cost of emergency transportation to a referral hospital is often a barrier to accessing health services for people living in remote rural areas. Research has indicated that a large percentage of the three mortality rates (infant, child and maternal) could be reduced by providing or supporting some intermediate modes of transport.

Some Facts:

- More than 60% of people in developing countries live more than 8km from a healthcare facility.
- A study in Addis Ababa found that on average, it takes women in labor 11 hours to reach a health care facility capable of addressing their needs.
- In Mpumalanga South Africa, lack of emergency transport between health institutions was identified as a major factor in at least 38% of maternal mortalities last year.¹
- The primary means of preventing maternal deaths is to provide rapid access to emergency obstetrical care, including treatment of hemorrhages, infections, hypertension, and obstructed labor.²

A Story:

“My brother had a heart problem for so many years and he was going for medical review every Monday. One Monday morning when I returned from the health centre, I was in the bathroom when I heard a sound of something. When I came out I found my brother was on the floor with his face on the ground. This has happened to him about three times, at the hospital we were told to rush him to the health centre. I was just alone at that time every one had gone to school others to the field. I rushed to the next family which was about 200 metres, we were told they will send someone to assemble an oxcart as that was our usual mode of transport. But this time all the animals (cattle, donkey) had gone to feed in the bush. To assemble this mode of transport took about an hour and at that time my brother was weak, sadly he died on the way to the rural health centre. The nurse told us that, had we arrived on time they would have tried their best to save his life... You can imagine all my life I imagine how a slightly better mode of transport would have saved my brother's life, the pain of losing my only brother will take many years to heal. If this bicycle ambulance were there in my brother's time he would have survived. Please, you have to start implementing this program before another person loses their loved ones and goes through the same pain I'm going through.”

The Solution – A Bicycle Ambulance Trailer a.k.a “Zambulance” by Zambikes

As a result of a Zambulance, communities have access to a free ambulance service. The clients are now able to receive medical attention in less time. Whereas it used to take between two to three hours to take a patient to a rural health centre that was 2.5 km away using an ox-cart, it now takes an average of 30 minutes using a Zambulance to cover the same distance. Whereas patients used to sit on the back rack of a bicycle en route to a rural health centre, now clients can lie flat on a Zambulance that is much safer and much more comfortable.

Additionally, the canopy of the Zambulance now provides privacy, especially important for the expectant mothers. The canopy also shelters the clients from the heat of the sun and the rain.

Some Figures:

- 96% of Caregivers having received a bicycle ambulance have stated that the provision of a bicycle ambulance helped them to do their work in the community more effectively.
- Over a four-month period a sample of 40 bicycle ambulances were used 82 times by the caregivers in the community to transport clients to receive healthcare.
- Moreover, 86% of the trips undertaken were lifesaving according to the Caregivers. This means, according to the data collected during the project monitoring and evaluation the 40 ambulances saved approximately 70 lives in four months.
- One community in Uganda used to lose 30 women a year in child birth while the last year with a bicycle ambulance has gone by without a single death of a pregnant mother.³
- On average, a bicycle ambulance saves a life every nine days of operation.⁴

Some Quotes:

- *"If there was no bicycle ambulance I was not going to sit here today and talk to you, I would have been wasted, thank you so very much."*
(Kelvin Banda Chipungu from Petauke.)
- *"It's a facility which has come to save lives and I'm happy that I used it."*
(Thresser Miti Kamiza from Katete.)
- *"Thank you very much, I would have died at home if it was not for the bicycle ambulance."*
(Geni Loza Chipungu from Petauke)

Sources:

1. Health-E African News:
<http://www.health-e.org.za/news/article.php?uid=19991204>
2. World Bank's Millennium Development Report on Maternal Health:
http://www.developmentgoals.org/Maternal_Health.htm
3. World Health Organization article:
<http://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/84/11/06-031106/en/>
4. Doug Funk, The Solon Foundation

*All other facts and figures were found in Transaid's "Bicycle Ambulance Final Report, March 2009."

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