

Riders for Health the Gambia update report – September 2008

Bringing freedom to the rural Gambia

Remote communities in rural Gambia are now benefiting from access to health care, thanks to Riders for Health.

Thanks to the support of those donating through GlobalGiving, Riders have recently been able to provide the village of Kankurang with an Uhuru. Kankurang is a small village in the Foni Bondali District, in the south west of the Gambia.

The Uhuru, a multi-purpose vehicle that can act as a community ambulance, water pump and freight carrier in a region isolated by great distances and harsh terrain. In areas where there is no public transport and the best roads are little better than dirt-tracks, these simple vehicles can mean the difference between life and death.

Jaria Sanneh is from Kankurang and has lived there all her life. Riders for Health's Community Officer, Ali Ceesay has trained Jaria to be the Uhuru driver for the village. She is 32 years old and is married with children. The villagers of Kankurang selected Jaria to fill this position. She is a volunteer and gets no compensation for her time.



Photo: Jaria on the Kankurang Uhuru

Jaria has also been trained to carry out basic maintenance on the Uhuru so that it will be reliable and never break down. Outreach technicians from Riders' workshop will also come out to carry out a more technical service once a month. This thorough maintenance routine shared by the driver and local technicians is critical to how Riders works to ensure sustainability and build a culture of maintenance into local communities.

Since June, Jaria has been taking patients to the nearest clinic at Kanilai on the Uhuru. The sufferers had a range of conditions including malaria, diarrhoea, and gastro-enteritis. One of Jaria's passengers was Mariama Bardje who said she was very grateful for the service she received and that the ride hadn't been too uncomfortable despite the pain she was in. Mariama had fallen badly and was told at Kanilai that she had a fractured wrist.



Photo: The children of Kankurang take a closer look at the Uhuru

Jaria knows to wear her protective gear at all times when she is riding the Uhuru although it does get very hot. This clothing is really important though as some the roads are sometimes difficult

even for the Uhuru to cover, especially in the rainy season.

The people of Kankurang warmly welcomed the Uhuru. Before, they used to have to rely on horse and donkey carts. Now they can just call Jaria any time, day or night. Jaria knows that this is a great responsibility for her to bear but is very committed to her new role. Her family are very supportive and proud of her.

Riders spoke to the Chief of the district, Dembo Badje. Chief Badje explained that not one of the 26 villages in his district has a health clinic. Furthermore, due to the remoteness of the area, there are few decent roads and that a lot of the villages become almost unreachable during the heavy rains. The Chief recalled how recently a man was bitten by a donkey. There was no means of transport to get him to hospital and by the next day he had lost so much blood that he died.



“Now there is an Uhuru however which will be able to play an important role in getting patients to the nearest clinic which is 35km away. This will ensure that pointless tragedies never occur again,” said Chief Badje.

“I am very proud that such an important thing came to my district. This would not have happened had it not been for Riders. They play a very important role- not just for my district but for the whole of the Gambia. They came at the right time to support my people.”

Photo: On foot is often the only way to get around in the Gambia.

Riders believes that in the 21st century people should not continue to bleed to death or lose their lives in ways that could easily be treated or prevented, simply because there is no means of getting them medical attention. This is why Riders has developed an appropriate infrastructure, run entirely by local men and women, in which to manage transport for health care and other aid delivery. Thanks to this system, Riders is ensuring that over 10 million men, women and children across rural Africa are now receiving regular health care.

Thank you

None of Riders’ achievements would have been possible without the generous support we have received through GlobalGiving. On behalf of all the people in the Gambia who are now able to access the kind of health care services the developed world takes for granted, Riders for Health would like to say “thank you”.

For more information

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