

Riders for Health the Gambia update report – January 2008

Riders for Health recently visited Jahangka and Mandinari, remote Gambian communities which are now benefiting from improved access to healthcare thanks to the generosity of GlobalGiving donors and the work of Riders for Health. Both these communities now have *uhuru*, multi-purpose vehicles that can act as community ambulances, water pumps and freight carriers in a region isolated by great distances and harsh terrain.

Jahangka

'The *uhuru* is saving a lot of lives here. There used to be two or three maternal mortalities every year, but since the *uhuru* came there haven't been any.' Isa Sisay, senior district nurse.

You may remember the story of Matty Gai and her baby Ibrahim, whose lives were saved by the *uhuru* when Matty was rushed to hospital in August 2006 after going into early labour. As well as being premature, it was a breech birth. Her husband went to get the *uhuru*. Matty lay on the stretcher while the Traditional Birth Attendant (TBA) rode behind the rider. Upon arrival at Bansang hospital she was admitted to the labour ward and delivered safely at around 8.30 on the 28th August. The doctor at the hospital said that if she had stayed in the village she would have died. It was the most difficult birth she'd had, and she feared she would lose her life.



Photo: Matty and one-year-old Ibrahim

'All I could think about was my life and the life of the child inside me. Without the *uhuru*, I would not be here telling my story today. I would have died,' says Matty. She also added that she felt very lucky that the *uhuru* was there as the baby she had before Ibrahim died just six days after birth – the day before her naming ceremony. 'I feel much more confident about my family's health now that the *uhuru* is here,' she says.

Because Riders also maintains the outreach vehicle for the Bansang Reproductive and Child Health (RCH) team, Matty has been able to take Ibrahim to their local outreach clinic every fortnight. He has now had all his immunisations and receives regular health checks.

The *uhuru* in Jahangka serves ten villages in total, and can make up to two trips per day during the rainy season. This is crucial as the rainy season is when malaria – one of the greatest killers in this region – is most prevalent, and being able to see a nurse quickly can often mean the difference between life and death.

Mandinari

The *uhuru* in Mandinari is also saving lives. Fatou Darboe is 22 and was expecting her third child in November 2007. At 4am on Tues 6th November, Fatou started to

lose blood. Luckily, her husband, Fabakary is the *uhuru* rider and decided to take her to Banjulding health centre, 5km away. The journey took around five minutes and the doctor at the clinic immediately referred her to the main hospital in Banjul due to the blood loss. The health centre didn't have the facilities to give her a blood transfusion and couldn't stop the bleeding. The doctor told her that her condition was very serious – if she'd stayed at home any longer she would have died.



Photo: The Mandinari uhuru

It took about an hour to get to the main hospital in Banjul, where they stopped the bleeding and gave her a transfusion. She arrived at around 7am and the baby was born at around 10am. Once the bleeding was under control, it was a straightforward birth.



'The *uhuru* saved my life', Fatou says, 'because I was able to reach all the destinations quickly'. Her husband is a farmer and if the *uhuru* had not been available he might not have been able to hire a vehicle to take her to the hospital. The charge for the *uhuru* is around 25 to 50 Dalasis (\$1.15-\$2.50) for local journeys, and about D150 (\$7) to go to Banjul. To hire a private vehicle to go to Banjul could be over D1000 (\$46) – 'If you have a woman in labour, they charge more because they know you are desperate,' says Fabakary.

The naming ceremony took place on the 13th November. Fabakary named the baby Masiranding, after his step-mother who recently passed away. Fabakary says that the *uhuru* 'is very important for our community. It has saved many lives'.

Photo: Fatou and Masiranding.

The *uhuru* serves Mandinari and nine surrounding villages, and often takes three or four patients per week. It is also used for taking farm produce to market etc.

Thank you

None of this would have been possible without the generous support we have received through GlobalGiving. On behalf of Matty, Ibrahim, Fatou, Masiranding and all the people in Jahangka and Mandinari who are now able to access vital healthcare services, Riders for Health would like to say "thank you".

For more information

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