

Riders for Health the Gambia update report – May 2008

Fighting malaria in rural Gambia

With World Malaria Day on 25th April, we have all been reminded of just one of the several diseases that are easily preventable and curable and yet are killing millions each year. More than one million people die of malaria every year, mostly infants, children and pregnant women and most of them in Africa. And this is despite the fact we have effective tools such as anti-malarial drugs, insecticide and bed-nets. But these facilities are not reaching those who so desperately need them.



As Nils Daulaire, CEO and President of the Global Health Council, says: *"We have developed the most miraculous tools for dealing with the health of humankind. But the best tools in the world don't make a bit of difference if they don't get out to where they're needed."*

Riders for Health's mission is to ensure that men, women and children no longer die of these easily preventable and treatable diseases, due to isolation and poverty. By making sure that health workers can reach even the most remote rural communities on a regular basis, Riders is guaranteeing that these people can receive treatment, bed nets, insecticide sprays and education on how to stay healthy and lead a productive, malaria-free life.

Photo: Mother and child with their new bed net.

How GlobalGiving donors have helped Riders fight malaria in the Gambia

Within a year of establishing themselves in the Gambia, Riders had increased the diagnosis rate of malaria by 55% (these figures are taken from a due diligence report carried out pro-bono in 2005 by OC&C, an international business consultancy). Since then the Riders Gambia team has continued to fight malaria, which is the cause of a third of deaths in children under the age of five in the country¹. Thanks to the support of GlobalGiving donors Riders have been able to mobilise more health workers to tackle this life-threatening disease.

Jahangka is one of the remote Gambian communities that is now benefiting from improved access to health care thanks to the generosity of GlobalGiving donors and the work of Riders for Health. This community now has an *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. When last in Jahangka, Riders caught up with Fomta Boye (30) and her niece Fatou Boye (23).



Photo: Fatou and Fatoma at the Jahangka clinic

¹ Statistic taken from the World Health Organisation fact sheet on the Gambia

Both Fomta and Fatou were taken to hospital by *Uhuru* on the same day with severe malaria. This is a life-threatening condition which develops quickly and can cause permanent brain damage.



Fomta sent her child to call the *Uhuru* rider around noon. It came immediately. The rider on duty that day, Assan, is also the volunteer village health worker and was at the village health post treating a minor malaria case. When Assan arrived, he found Fomta in a high fever and very disoriented. She sat in the *Uhuru* chair and reached Bansang before 1pm. Without the *Uhuru*, she would have had to travel by horse cart – a journey which would have taken over two hours in the midday sun.

Photo: The Jahangka Uhuru

Assan took her to the outpatient clinic at Bansang hospital. As an *Uhuru* referral,

Fomta was treated as a priority case. She was given tablets straight away, and Assan was sent to the pharmacy to collect a prescription for three doses of injectable chloroquine. Fomta received the first injection at the hospital and took the others home with her. She was already feeling better when the *Uhuru* brought her back from hospital that afternoon.

The second call for the *Uhuru* came at 5.00pm. Fatou was more than six months pregnant and suffering from severe malaria. She had pain all over her body, which she described as the worst pain she had felt in her life. She was very tired so her husband called for the *Uhuru*. They left the village by 5.20pm and arrived at the hospital just after 6pm. She received the same treatment as Fomta, but the next day she was no better and was taken back to the hospital. This time the treatment was successful. As she was so heavily pregnant, she was also advised not to do any heavy work during the rest of her pregnancy.

'The Uhuru is saving a lot of lives here' commented the Senior district nurse, Isa Sisay.

Photo: Fatou Boye



The Outreach Team from Bansang

The Reproductive and Child Health (RCH) outreach team conducts visits to communities three days a week, covering 12 villages, each of which is visited on a fortnightly basis. In total, they serve between 55,000 and 75,000 mothers and children, providing routine vaccinations, health screening, weighing of babies and treatment for early stages of malaria.

The vehicle used by the RCH team is five-years-old and thanks to Riders' preventive maintenance system has covered over 222,000km without a single breakdown. The team at the Bansang can now reach the clinics reliably and on a regular basis.

At the Njoben clinic, which is about 13km from Bansang, the Riders team met Incha Boye (35), who lives 7km from the clinic in a village on the border with Senegal. Due to its location the village is not served by outreach health workers so this clinic is the only public health care she receives for herself and her children.

Incha reported that she couldn't count the number of times in the past she had walked to the clinic but no-one from the hospital came. Now, she says, it is much better. 'I don't what has happened, but something has changed'. Now, thanks to Riders, the team never miss a clinic.



Photo: The clinic at Njoben

Usually Incha walks to the clinic but on the day the Riders team were there, she arrived on a donkey cart driven by her 12-year old nephew, Ibrahim. This was because her three-year-old son, Kebba, was ill. Incha also brought her youngest daughter Mariama, who is one year old.

Both children received immunisations against polio, diphtheria, whooping cough and tetanus, as well as an oral dose of vitamin A. Mariama was also

weighed. Although Incha was only worried about Kebba, who had a fever at night, both children were checked and were diagnosed with malaria. They were both given chloroquine and paracetamol, and Kebba also received treatment for an infection. Incha was given follow-up medication to take away with her. Thanks to Riders and GlobalGiving the outreach team no longer misses clinics and was able to treat Kebba and Mariama and probably saved their lives.

Photo: Kebba receiving a vaccine from a RHC health worker

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".



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