

Riders for Health Kenya update report – January 2009

Mobilising grassroots carers from Western Kenya to reach thousands with hope and support

Riders for Health's vision is of a world in which the poor do not suffer and die due to lack of access to health care and other vital services simply because they are isolated by distance or terrain. One of Riders' goals is to build and strengthen capacity in the countries in which we operate.

To achieve this, Riders is planning to replicate the partnerships we have with grassroots organisations such as Vumilia in Kenya. These partnerships have a real impact in local communities and are enabling people to lift themselves out of poverty.

Vumilia is a women's group based in the Kabras district, in western Kenya. They are working to overcome HIV/AIDS in their community, through the psychological, social and economic empowerment of women. Before Vumilia started working with Riders, they were covering 150 households. Now, they are reaching 500 households with regular support and care.



Photo: The team from Vumilia on the Riders' motorcycles

'We have realised that there are just so many bedridden people who need medical and palliative care. Our team has referred many patients to hospital who would almost certainly have died if it were not for our intervention,' reported the director of Vumilia, Rose Moon.

"There has been increased area coverage of over four locations. Initially, staff workers used to cover an estimated 5 km square. This has all changed since we started working with Riders."

Increasing the confidence and capacity of local women

Often the carers from Vumilia are HIV positive themselves. Rosemary Mani was married to a sugar cane farmer. When they were tested at a local clinic she found out that both she and her husband were HIV positive. After her husband passed away

Rosemary was left to care for her two children and six stepchildren. She got sick and was very scared for herself and her children. Her doctor referred her to Vumilia where she joined the support group.



Photo: Rosemary and her bike waiting to go.

That was two years ago. Now Rosemary is strong, healthy, and provides care to other HIV positive

people. Riders trained her to ride a motorcycle and carry out the daily maintenance needed to keep her on the road. Every morning she leaves with the rest of the team to visit patients in the community and she is always in the lead.

Reaching Joseph Anenje with hope and care

Joseph is a 38-year-old widower for the Lunyinya area with two boys aged two and eight. His wife died in March last year. A month later his sister passed away, leaving Joseph to care for her three children too. In the months that followed, Joseph's own health started to deteriorate.

Riders trained six of Vumilia's carers in motorcycle riding and maintenance. This allowed Rosemary, from Vumilia, to reach the Lunyinya area. By the time she met Joseph, he was bedridden. He was in a great deal of discomfort and none of the medication he had tried was making any difference.

"My children are innocently suffering socially and economically, as I am unable to provide for them. Things have not been well as am unable to walk and nobody is helping despite the five children in this house," Joseph told Rosemary.

Photo: The team from Vumilia



Rosemary persuaded Joseph to go for an HIV test and Vumilia arranged for the transport from his home to the clinic, as he could not afford it. Joseph was found to be HIV positive and put on a treatment programme. Vumilia also put Joseph in touch with social workers to get help looking after the children. Thanks to Vumilia's regular home visits, he has started improving. At the last visit, Joseph's condition had improved so much he was able to do his business of buying maize and planting vegetables.



Photo: A Vumilia care provider out in the community.

Having a reliable motorcycle has allowed Rosemary to help others to live with HIV, as she herself was helped. Her training in riding and basic maintenance means she can confidently go out to other communities to offer support, knowing that she will not be exhausted by a long walk and that she will be able to get home to her own family in the evening.

Reliable transport makes a huge difference to organisations, like Vumilia, as it means they can not only reach more people, but also spend longer with them. This is crucial when dealing with sensitive issues such as sexual health. The mobility and technical knowledge is the vital missing link that is allowing them to reach many more women and children.

Mobilising carers from Limuru

Now with the help of the GlobalGiving donors, Riders want to mobilise more of these grassroots carers who can make such a difference, including six from Limuru. The Presbytery of Limuru, in partnership with the ministry of health in Kenya, runs six dispensaries, three of which are in Limuru and three in Narok, in western Kenya, providing treatment for thousands of men, women and children. The Limuru dispensary caters for the Kikuyu people and Narok mainly caters for the Masai people.

In addition to the dispensaries, the Presbytery run an orphanage for girls in Limuru, which currently has 50 children. They expect to increase this number to 200 children by August 2009. The Presbytery also plans to run an orphanage for boys in Narok to initially accommodate 50 children.



The motorcycles will be used among other things to supply drugs and co-ordination, to assist with outreach programmes, health talks, raising awareness of the dispensaries, child monitoring and immunisation and visiting house bound and bed-ridden patients.

Riders have been donated the six motorcycles. Now with the help of Global Giving we just need to raise money to cover training and equipment.

The cost to train a care provider from Limuru in motorcycle riding and basic maintenance is \$4,000. This cost also includes full protective clothing necessary in the harsh African terrain and basic tool kits for the daily preventive maintenance, and will cover the running costs for one year.

Riders for Health therefore hopes to raise \$24,000 through Global Giving to mobilise the carers of Limuru and allow them to reach thousands more men, women and children with their message of hope and better health.

Thank you

Riders would like to thank all those who have supported our work in Kenya so far. Without your support, none of what we do would be possible and we are truly grateful for all the generosity we receive.

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