



Wamuyu Kariuki

Wamuyu Kariuki's story

Founder of Malkia Moto Club

Wamuyu Kariuki has been a motorcycle rider since 2015 and has travelled through more than 20 countries in Africa and Latin America on her motorcycle. She delivers road safety education to motorcycle taxi (boda boda) riders and is passionate about supporting women in the industry. Wamuyu founded Malkia Moto Club, the first club for female boda boda riders.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Wamuyu and her husband had just returned to Kenya after travelling through Latin America on their motorcycles. Wamuyu started creating educational road safety related content for social media platforms like Instagram, but she soon realised that she needed to meet with riders in-person to spread the message more effectively. She started 'I Ride 4 Helmets', which provides second-hand, unused, quality helmets to those who need them most.

"I would put a helmet in my backpack and get on my motorcycle. This was still during lockdown, so most of the riders would stand in small groups while waiting for work. I would go

up to them, and we would talk about road safety, helmet safety, and the gear you need to wear. I named it 'I Ride 4 Helmets' because I was physically riding to educate people about helmets and provide helmets."

Wamuyu then started attending local meetings of boda boda riders, ensuring that riders were registered with the National Health Insurance Fund (NHIF) and offering payment plans for good quality helmets. Wamuyu emphasizes the importance of protective gear, defensive driving, and wearing a quality helmet, especially for boda boda riders, who typically ride smaller motorcycles and who might think protective gear is unnecessary.

"I ride a larger motorcycle, I'm known as a private rider and tend to wear more protective gear. People tend to wear less of this on a boda boda. But in the hospital, the bill is the same."

Wamuyu's social media following and passion for road safety led her to join the National Helmet Wearing Coalition, which was formed by Transaid and partners in 2021 to improve safety for the country's 2.2 million motorcycle riders and their passengers, the majority of which are used as taxis. Motorcycle users made up 35 percent of all Kenyan road deaths in 2023, with low helmet wearing prevalence and quality representing major factors in road deaths.

The Coalition brings together multiple stakeholders from boda boda associations, local and national government, and law enforcement to strengthen helmet wearing.



“Education, education, education, is how we will be able to get more people to wear helmets. I want every rider to understand their own safety. Safety is not just for the police or for your insurance agency, it is for yourself. I want riders to understand they’re responsible for their own safety, too.”

The financial burden of motorcycle crashes is huge for individuals and the Kenyan economy, as detailed in the Coalition's [‘A Fare Price’ report](#). Wamuyu says, “Without education, information and understanding of the importance of safety as a motorcycle rider, we create more damage. We have more crashes and overwhelm our hospitals. The economy suffers because the people supporting it get injured and are out of work, and families suffer as a result.”

For Wamuyu, motorcycle safety is also personal. Sadly, while on her way to a mentorship graduation of young women, Wamuyu was thrown from her motorcycle by a matatu (minibus taxi).

“My gear saved me. You can see the impact and the scratches on my helmet, but it did not crack. Even the visor did not crack. I skidded on my side, and I could feel my head bumping on the tarmac.”

Wamuyu had a deep cut in her leg from the crash and had to go to hospital. After the crash, Wamuyu's confidence to ride was low, so she undertook training to rebuild her riding confidence following the crash.

Mentorship is one of the ways Wamuyu supports female riders, whether they ride commercially or privately:



“When I started riding, there were very few women. It was always very exciting for other people to see a lady on a motorcycle,” Wamuyu explains, “but with time, the numbers have really grown. Today, women riders number about 300, and we have several clubs that address different needs.”

“In 2017, I took my first long distance ride. I crossed Kenya through Namanga, and went all the way to Kigoma at the other end of Tanzania. I came back via Sebanyak, Kisumu, Kisii, Kirito, and back to Nairobi. I documented what I was doing and that raised the awareness of women in motorcycling, which was not something that was publicly talked about.”

Wamuyu brings commercial (boda boda) and private riders together, especially for national events like International Female Riders Day, which is held in May. She also invites everyone to events like tree planting, which aim to offset the carbon emissions emitted by motorcycles.

"The unity - bringing women together, supporting each other, has actually made these ladies feel comfortable in the industry."

With the growing popularity of motorcycle riding amongst women, Wamuyu ensures that she talks about road safety, and recommends different training according to the different needs of the rider. "What is your 'why' to get on a motorcycle? Please do not get on a motorcycle to look cool- it can be dangerous. We need to start you on the right 'why', and if changed, we need to manage that. Our safety enables the industry to continue thriving and growing."

Wamuyu encourages women to enter the growing motorcycle sector:

"The world has advanced. Things have changed. We can all work anywhere. There are so many opportunities in the motorcycle industry to choose from as a woman. If riding is not your thing, sell the riding gear. If riding gear is not your thing, be a mechanic. If being a mechanic is not your thing, be a dealer. If that's not your thing, be an educator, an instructor, a trainer."

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