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# WORLD MALARIA DAY 25.4.2025



## Interview with Benard Mpande

### Emergency Transport System (ETS) Support Officer for the Mobilising Access to Maternal Health (MAMaZ) and MAMaZ Against Malaria projects in Zambia

Benard Mpande is an Emergency Transport System (ETS) Support Officer in Zambia working as part of the Mobilising Access to Maternal Health (MAMaZ) and MAMaZ Against Malaria projects. The MAMaZ Against Malaria and MAM@Scale programmes aim to increase access to effective treatment for severe malaria for hard-to-reach communities with high malaria prevalence.

Benard became involved in the projects in 2010 after working as a driver transporting the project team and Ministry of Health colleagues from Lusaka to rural areas. When the More MAMaZ project began, Benard was offered the new role of ETS Support Officer, supporting communities on how to implement emergency transport systems.

In rural areas like Serenje and Chitambo districts, the bicycle ambulance was established as an Emergency Transport System (ETS) in a context where there are limited formal ambulance services. Staffed by volunteer riders and custodians, they

provide a vital link between rural communities and health services.

Benard recalls how he first started working with the MAMaZ programs:



**"I accepted the role of ETS Support Officer because I saw the need. When talking to these community members, there was always a component of transport that was coming up. They always talked about the need for transport."**

"I was touched. As I was in transport as a driver, I thought it would be easy for me to do the ETS support component in the project."

Since the implementation of ETS and training, Benard says that the communities have

changed a lot: “When we started in 2010, there were so many maternal deaths and malaria cases - malaria deaths were very, very high in these two districts. But after the MAMaZ interventions, the numbers actually dropped.”

“There are a lot of stories I can tell. There's one particular story of a child in Mulilima, in Serenje District. In the early hours, the parents noticed that their son was ill and sent for Charity, the community health volunteer. When she arrived, she found the boy unconscious. She administered RAS (rectal artesunate suppositories), which is a pre-treatment for suspected severe malaria that our volunteers administer at community level.

“They arranged for a bicycle ambulance to take the boy to the health facility, which is in Mulilima. As I'm talking now, he's very much alive and he's doing great.”

For Benard, the MAMaZ projects carry out vital work.

**“The MAMaZ projects are very, very important because they easily communicate with the community members.”**

“Sometimes communities can find it difficult to understand what you're trying to do, but the systems the MAMaZ projects use are easily understood by the communities because they consider local context. Simple things like songs which teach the danger signs of malaria or a maternal health emergency, for example.”

**“What I can say is that our interventions are really helping communities.”**

Nevertheless, Benard also highlights that programmes like MAMaZ need to be sustained to keep making a difference.

“There's a risk that we can't progress. Community health volunteers are continuing the work trying to educate the communities, but there's a risk of not sustaining what we left on the ground.

“When we first started, there were these young girls that were very small, but now they are older. They are in their own homes. They could have forgotten what they learned. So it's important that we go back and train them to keep themselves safe and aware.”



Benard (far right) delivering training to ETS rider volunteers in Serenje District, Zambia



Benard would like to see a scale-up across all of Zambia. "Issues of maternal health and malaria are very serious all over Zambia, especially here in rural areas. There are over 100 districts in Zambia, with a large population which needs a lot of these interventions.

"With more support, I would suggest that we cover the whole country so that we could aim for the same progress made in areas like Serenje and Chitambo. It's important that other places also have the chance to implement these interventions."

**"The last thing I want to say is to the potential donors or funders: there's a lot of work out there. Together, yourselves and ourselves, we are making a difference. We are saving lives and together we can manage severe malaria and maternal health."**

Benard won Transaid's inaugural Victor Simfukwe Award in 2020, alongside Project Officer Sebastian Simpasa. The award honours Transaid's friend and colleague Victor Simfukwe, a Zambia-based Project Manager, who tragically lost his life in a road traffic collision in 2019. The award recognises those who have made an outstanding contribution to Transaid's mission.

The MAMaZ programme partners include: Transaid, DAI Global Health Limited, Development Data, Disacare, the Zambian National Malaria Elimination Centre (NMEC), and Serenje District Health Management Team (DHMT).



Benard meeting Transaid Patron HRH The Princess Royal in 2024



Benard in Serenje District, Zambia