



## Meet Charity Chalwe

### Bridging the gap between the community and health facility

Charity Chalwe is a volunteer bicycle ambulance rider and custodian with Transaid's Mobilising Access to Maternal Health (MAMaZ) and MAMaZ Against Malaria projects, serving her community in rural Zambia. In areas where formal ambulance services are limited or non-existent, Transaid implements bicycle ambulances as a form of Emergency Transport System (ETS). Riders like Charity provide a vital link between communities and life-saving healthcare, particularly for pregnant women and children with suspected severe malaria.

Charity volunteered for the role in 2021, after a community meeting called by the local headman raised serious concerns about maternal deaths. Faced with the reality that women were losing their lives due to delays in reaching health facilities, Charity made a decision that would change not only her own life, but the lives of many others.

"There were concerns that the community was experiencing a number of maternal deaths," she says. "So based on that meeting and that problem, I decided to volunteer to help my community, especially in saving the lives of pregnant mothers."

For Charity, volunteering as an ETS rider is about more than emergency transport; it's about investing in the future of her community.

**"What motivates me is helping my fellow women, and children with malaria," she shares. "I'm very hopeful that the children I'm helping today, will one day become doctors and nurses and they'll be able to help this community."**

Like many women working on the frontlines of community health, Charity faces significant challenges. The most pressing is the limited equipment; there is only one bicycle ambulance currently situated in Charity's community and sometimes more than one community member needs emergency transport at the same time.

"Sometimes I find it very difficult to operate because we only have one bicycle, and I would sometimes not be able to assist all the cases,

which makes me feel bad," she explains. "So if the project can provide more bicycles, that would be good for the community."

Despite these challenges, Charity has seen first-hand how the bicycle ambulance has transformed access to healthcare.

"Since this project started, many community members have been able to access the bicycle ambulance and be transported quickly to the facility," she says. "Before, people had to walk long distances. Now we spend less time on transfers, and we can see better progress in our community."

Looking to the future of healthcare in her community, Charity is hopeful. Health facilities are better staffed, patients are attended to more quickly, and trust in the health system is growing. Still, she knows more must be done, especially for families living far from the nearest clinic.

"Some homes are very far from Mpelembe health facility," she explains. "If another clinic could be built closer to those communities, it would make it much easier for people to access primary health care."

For the volunteers themselves, Charity suggests support with a food bank and an extra bicycle to help escort the bicycle ambulance.

On International Women's Day, Charity's story reflects this year's call for 'Rights. Justice. Action. For ALL Women and Girls.' In many rural communities, structural barriers and social norms can limit women's access to timely, life-saving maternal healthcare, despite healthcare being a fundamental right.

By stepping forward as a volunteer bicycle ambulance rider, Charity is ensuring pregnant women and children can reach care when it matters most.

**"I already offered myself to be a volunteer," she says simply. "All I ask for are the tools that will help me do my job effectively."**

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



Charity on her community's bicycle ambulance