



L-R: Martha, their baby son, Owen, Gracious, Owen Junior



Charity Chalwe, ETS rider in Owen Junior and Gracious's community

Owen Junior and Gracious's story

Reaching malaria treatment in time

Owen Chumbu and his wife Martha Nambeya live in rural Zambia near Mpelembe Rural Health Facility in Chitambo District with their two sons and wider family, including their niece, Gracious. Like many families in remote communities, reaching healthcare can be difficult due to terrain and availability of transport.

Malaria remains one of the leading causes of illness and death in Zambia, particularly among young children. In rural areas where health facilities may be many kilometres away, delays in reaching treatment can quickly turn a dangerous illness into a life-threatening emergency.

When Owen Jr. and Gracious separately fell ill with malaria, their family relied on the community's bicycle ambulance, part of a locally run Emergency Transport System (ETS) implemented by Transaid and partners, to reach care in time.

In the early hours one morning, Owen and Martha noticed that their son Owen Junior had developed a very high fever. Hours later, his condition worsened and he began fitting.

Owen recalls: "We knew that this is a serious problem and we needed to see a health worker. So we called on the emergency transport system (ETS) rider to help us."

A volunteer rider arrived with the community bicycle ambulance, and Owen Junior was quickly transported to Mpelembe Rural Health Facility. At the facility, health workers treated him for severe malaria. Thanks to the rapid response, Owen Junior made a full recovery.

Owen Junior's illness was not the first time the family relied on the service. Martha recalls several occasions when her niece Gracious also needed urgent care, following symptoms of high fever and fitting.



"There are many, many times that Gracious has used a bicycle ambulance. Based on what the community volunteers have told us, we quickly came to seek the help of the rider who quickly took Gracious to the facility."

For families like theirs, the bicycle ambulance is often the only way to reach healthcare quickly.



Owen says, "The bicycle ambulance has really helped us because some of us do not have a bicycle, so it makes it very difficult for us to go to the facility, which is far from here. The bicycle ambulance helps us to transport our children and our loved ones whenever they are sick."

However, as the community grows, the demand for emergency transport is increasing. "What we would want to see is to have a good number of bicycle ambulances," Owen says, "So that in case one is already taking a patient, we can use another bicycle ambulance that is available. Right now, we only have one. If it is already in use, you may find that you cannot access that service."

"I'm sharing our story because I want people to know how much the bicycle ambulance has helped us, so if in the future we have the same problem, we can continue to get help." Owen says.

Programmes such as Transaid and partners' MAMaZ Against Malaria and its follow-up initiatives aim to improve access to healthcare and lifesaving treatment in remote communities. The bicycle ambulance system was established as an Emergency Transport System (ETS) in areas where formal ambulance services are limited.

Staffed by volunteer riders and supported by community health volunteers, these bicycle ambulances provide a vital link between rural communities and nearby health facilities, ensuring that people can reach care quickly when danger signs appear.

As the global community marks World Malaria Day 2026, stories from families like Owen and Martha's demonstrate that fighting malaria is not only about medicines and diagnostics, but about ensuring that people can reach care in time.

The MAMaZ and MAM programme partners include: Transaid, DAI Global Health Limited, Development Data, Disacore, Medicines for Malaria Venture (MMV), the Zambia National Malaria Elimination Centre (NMEC), and Serenje District Health Management Team (DHMT).



Owen Junior, Owen, Martha, and their baby son