



Interview with Prisca Chalwe

Saving lives with a bicycle ambulance: Prisca Chalwe, bicycle ambulance rider and mother

As a bicycle ambulance rider and Safe Motherhood Action Group member, Prisca Chalwe plays a critical role in connecting her community of Kate in Chitambo District, Zambia, to essential health services. Her story is one of service, and also deeply personal.

Prisca's journey began in 2019, when she volunteered to join the Safe Motherhood Action Group after recognising a pressing need in her community. Despite the presence of a health facility, many women continued to give birth at home, and access to care remained limited.

Motivated to make a difference, Prisca stepped into her role after the village headman asked for volunteers. As an emergency transport system (ETS) bicycle ambulance rider, Prisca transports patients, raises awareness of seeking healthcare, and supports Community Health Volunteers and district health staff with referrals. Over time, she has witnessed meaningful change.

"I've seen significant reduction in maternal mortality as well as malaria mortality. This has encouraged me to continue volunteering."

Malaria remains a leading cause of illness and death in many rural communities, particularly among young children. For Prisca, the importance of rapid access to treatment became clear not only through her work, but through her own experience as a mother.

"So, let me start with myself - my own child," she shares. "I saw the signs and symptoms of severe malaria, and I used the bicycle ambulance. I put him on the bicycle ambulance and left for the health facility where my child was attended to. And he's better now, he's OK."

At the health facility, her child was diagnosed with malaria and received timely treatment, an outcome that might have been very different without knowledge of the danger signs of severe malaria and access to transport.

Beyond individual cases, Prisca sees broader transformation in her community. Acceptance of the programme has grown, with strong support from traditional leaders and community members alike. "The community is going to be much, much, much better because everyone in the community has accepted this work and they are appreciative," she says.



"I would say the future of my community will hold a lot of goodness."

However, challenges remain. Some areas are even further from the health facility, making it difficult to respond quickly to emergencies. Prisca highlights the need for additional transport support to strengthen outreach for community health volunteers, such as implementing more bicycles to help them travel.

Prisca's dual perspective as both an ETS bicycle ambulance rider and a mother powerfully illustrates how community-led healthcare saves lives. In her community, care begins with awareness and education, is strengthened through accessible transport, and continues with timely treatment at a health facility. This continuum of care ensures that patients, especially children with severe malaria, receive life-saving interventions when they need them most.

This impact is reflected in the results of Transaid and partners' MAMaZ Against Malaria programme (MAM@Scale). In Serenje District, Zambia, the programme saw an 87% reduction in deaths among children with severe malaria. Across both the MAMaZ Against Malaria (MAM) and MAM@Scale projects, 6,616 children were transported to health facilities through Emergency Transport Systems (ETS) between 2017 and 2021, demonstrating the critical role of community-based transport in improving survival outcomes.

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



Prisca (third from left, top) with other ETS riders, Community Health Volunteers, and members of her community