

# MOTORCYCLES SAVING LIVES

By Rachel Harrington, Riders for Health

The health of African people is in decline. Life expectancy is shockingly low (the average is just 43 years) and getting lower. But, as the developed world continues its investment in disease control measures, one vital issue is not being addressed: transportation.

The sad truth is that, even if there were a vaccine for malaria or HIV tomorrow, it could not be delivered. The terrain between impoverished communities is rough and unforgiving and even when there are roads, they are pot-holed, slow and dangerous. Conventional vehicle technology is not supported in the ordinary way in rural Africa – there is barely any transport infrastructure and minimal service delivery. Unmanaged vehicles break down after only a few thousand kilometres.

## Overcoming 'the tyranny of distance'

HRH The Princess Royal – patron of UK-based charity Riders for Health – describes this isolation of African communities as 'the tyranny of distance' and it is this tyranny that causes problems for ministries of health, NGOs, the World Health Organisation and the UN, to name but a few.

So, if Africa has no infrastructure for the automatic preventive maintenance of cars, trucks or motorcycles, then you have to invent one – and one that does just as good a job as the one in Europe or the US. In a land without vehicle dealerships or road-side rescue services to call on, Randy Mamola, Andrea Coleman and Barry Coleman – the founders of Riders for Health – identified a clear objective: to

invent a system that would make sure health service delivery was never undermined by failing vehicles, no matter how harsh the conditions. The result? Transport Resource Management – a system managing the vehicles, people and money involved in the health service delivery operation. A network of trained local technicians works with Riders' fleet managers to make sure that replacement parts are fitted on time (in other words, before they break), and that regular services are carried out. The Riders teams work on an 'outreach' basis, meaning that technicians travel out to service the vehicles in the locations where they are being used. The technicians also train the health workers who use the vehicles in basic maintenance and repair to ensure that the vehicles perform correctly until their next service. Vehicles of all kinds – motorcycles, trucks, cars and even motorcycle-and-sidecar outfits – are now running perfectly in Zimbabwe, Nigeria and the Gambia, meeting the healthcare needs of over 10 million people.

## Revolutionising healthcare delivery

Two years ago, Honda Motor Company made the landmark decision to donate 75 XL125 motorcycles to the Riders programme in Zimbabwe, together with parts to keep them running for five





years. These resilient motorcycles, managed by the dedicated Riders Zimbabwe team, are all now at work revolutionising the delivery of healthcare to remote communities in the districts of Chegutu and Gutu.

Four health workers who have been riding the new motorcycles have sent in reports about the impact these disease-fighting machines are having. Each health worker is now travelling over 1500 kilometres further per month than they could before having the motorcycle, meaning that the number of people they can attend to has risen by nearly 85%. One health worker said: "Instead of covering my wards in three months the area is now being covered within three weeks."

This increased mobility has also meant that the health workers are able to respond more rapidly to outbreaks of disease. They can also afford to spend more time with each community, dispensing vital advice and education as well as vaccinations, mosquito nets and medication. This means that, in a country where a child dies of malaria every 30 seconds, these health workers have been able to reduce infant mortality rates by an average of 21%.

### Getting Africa on track

Without the generosity of Riders' supporters, this would not have been possible. There would be no Riders technicians to maintain the motorcycles, no workshops for them to be serviced in, no tools or replacement parts, and no school to train the health workers in preventive maintenance and safe-riding techniques.

*To find out more about how motorcycles are saving lives, and to make a donation, please visit [www.riders.org](http://www.riders.org)*

