



The Bicycling Empowerment Network (BEN Namibia) is a non-profit organisation that began in May 2005. It aims to empower disadvantaged Namibians through provision of sustainable transport and bicycle-related income generation opportunities.

## *Why bicycles?*

Several studies on the relation between transport and development have demonstrated that bicycles are often the most appropriate technology for short distances, with the lowest operating costs in sub-Saharan Africa. They can be used on both paved roads and low-quality paths by broad segments of the population. A bicycle carries up to four times the weight, goes twice as far and travels twice as fast as a person walking.

As part of an organised system that provides access to ongoing spare parts and maintenance, the bicycle can be an important development tool. In a poor community, access to a bicycle means greater independence and increased social, economic and educational opportunities.

## *What we do*

### **Bicycles for HIV/AIDS-affected communities**

Our main work is bicycle distribution. We import donated second hand bikes from overseas charities and refurbish them by employing and training local people in bike mechanics. We distribute bikes to community-based organisations (CBOs) whose

volunteers and staff use them to greatly improve the efficiency of their work.

To date we have arranged the delivery of over 4,000 bicycles to 36 CBOs covering projects mainly for home-based care of people living with HIV/AIDS and orphans and vulnerable children. Namibia's HIV/AIDS infection rate is 19.9 percent, and there are over 100,000 orphans in the country.

### **Bicycle Empowerment Centres**

Through a partnership with a Canadian organisation, Bicycles for Humanity, we have developed a new bicycle distribution model, the Bicycle Empowerment Centre (BEC). Each BEC is a shipping container with around 350 bicycles, spare parts and tools. BECs are delivered to the CBOs that BEN Namibia works with and run as community-based bicycle shops. We delivered the first BEC in December 2006 in the village of Okathitu, and there are now a total of 8 BECs established around the country. .

### **Bicycle Ambulances**

Our work with HIV/AIDS home based care volunteers showed that in many cases clients were being transported to health facilities on the luggage racks of bicycles, or were not able to go at all. To





improve Namibians' access to healthcare we have developed and are now manufacturing bicycle-pulled ambulances. The ambulances are 'stretchers on wheels' that attach to normal bicycles and tow a sick person or pregnant woman to a hospital or clinic where no other transport is available.

Ambulances are delivered with training in use and a discussion on management, and are monitored closely through follow-up field visits. With over 50 ambulances now delivered, we are able to gather extensive data on their use that helps us improve both design and delivery.

### Team BEN Namibia

Team BEN Namibia is a bicycle racing team comprised of some of Namibia's top young cyclists. As well as serving as a platform for their cycling careers, team members raise HIV/AIDS awareness, advocate prevention, encourage voluntary HIV/AIDS counseling and testing, and promote healthy life style choices. "Know your HIV Status. Get fit, be focused. Do sports, not drugs" are the messages the team conveys.

The team will make live appearances across the country in the 'Spin for Life' tour, featuring team members on trainers and exercise bikes, screenings of bicycle racing DVDs, and distribution of HIV/AIDS information. They will also launch incentive programmes for HIV testing, with bicycles offered as 'lucky dip' prizes at testing centres. A pilot project saw testing increase at one village clinic from an



average of 49 people per month to 330 the month that a bicycle was offered as an incentive.

### Research

BEN Namibia has conducted research on the impact of transport on access to healthcare for people living with HIV/AIDS in Namibia. While our monitoring and evaluation of projects has taught us a lot about the constraints faced by people in rural communities, it was felt that a more in-depth understanding was required.

The research was conducted in partnership with the International Community of Women Living with HIV/AIDS (ICW-Namibia), Namibia's Legal Assistance Centre AIDS Law Unit (LAC/ALU), with funding from Yelula/U-khâi and the National Paralegal Association. The results will be published in June 2008, and will serve to further inform our work on provision of bicycles, bicycle ambulances and other related technologies in Namibia.

### Advocacy

BEN Namibia is working on improving conditions for cyclists in Namibia. Our main focus in 2008/9 is on the capital, Windhoek, where we are working with the City of Windhoek to implement the City's first cycle paths and lanes.



### Contact

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