

Better access to healthcare

How AFCAP is helping pregnant women in Tanzania access health facilities



38 year old farmer, Mwajuma Haji Athumani, reveals how the condition of the new road could have saved her baby's life

Every year around 50 million women give birth without skilled care. The vast majority of these women live in developing countries like Tanzania. In rural Bagamoyo a major problem is access. Many of the roads are difficult to travel on and transport during rain can be impossible. The Bago to Talawanda road was in such poor condition that the local community did not call it a road. It was called a passing. Roughton has provided design and consultancy services, under the African Community Access Programme (AFCAP), to provide reliable access for rural communities in all weather, allowing pregnant women to access the health facilities that they need at any time.

"Before construction we were just using natural medicines for caring," says Talawanda West Village Chairman Saidi Dibwe. "But now many sick people are able to be transported."

Three years ago, before the road was constructed, Mwajuma Haji Athumani, 38, went into labour at home in her village of Kiembe. She stares at the ground and says: "I am too ashamed to talk about it." The mother-of-five was too distraught to tell the story in her own words but she wanted her story to be told.

It was raining heavily the night she went into labour. The road had become more of a river than an access route. No vehicles could pass; the only access was by foot. It was very muddy and slippery. The road towards Kiwangwa hospital was completely impassable in the rain so Mwajuma faced a difficult 10km walk to the nearest medical dispensary in Talawanda. It was a painful two-hour walk in terrible conditions and when she arrived at the dispensary the doctor was not there.

Still desperate for someone to deliver her baby she faced another four-hour walk to the next hospital in Chalinze, 20km away. But, upon arrival she faced the news that they couldn't help her so she was sent to the Tomby Kibaha Hospital. The baby did not survive the journey. Mwajuma gave birth at the side of a road, without any medical assistance, to a baby that was already dead.

She believes that if the road was better her baby would still be alive. "The doctor suggested that if the road was better children wouldn't die," she says. "Thank you for constructing that road. Now we can manage to get to the hospital at any time. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you."

Mwajuma, who normally travels by bicycle, recalls: "Before the road construction there was many many problems. The road was very bad. We used only bicycle to travel from one place." But, pregnant women are unable to ride because the vibrations created by the bad condition of the road can be dangerous.

Asha Faraha, 35-year-old mother, from neighbouring village Ludiga, used a bicycle for the first three months of her pregnancy. "But, after that I had to walk because it created a pain in my back," she recalls. "Sometimes if I go on bicycle I urinate on the bicycle. So it forced me to walk," she says.

But, now that construction has finished, cars and motorcycles are able to pass in all weather. Thanks to the increase in transport, Asha, who has to visit the dispensary in Talawanda every month with her 14 month old baby, Subira Ibrahim, is now able to get there in just 10 minutes.

"Now you can travel easily from one place to another," agrees Mwajuma. There is even a public bus that comes once a week. This allows for access to health facilities at any time. "The situation is good because you are able to travel at any time, even at night," she says. "Now my health is good."

Asha Faraha, 35, with baby Subira

