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Riders for Health: Which Road to Scale

Transportation in Africa needs to be made a high-profile issue so people can realize its importance, address it, and allow it to disappear again.

— Andrea Coleman, co-founder, Riders for Health¹

In July 2010, Andrea Coleman, co-founder and chief executive officer of Riders for Health, sat with a short memo her country team had prepared for her. Outside her small office in western Africa, the last of the Riders' new motorcycles for The Gambia were arriving in batches, part of a fleet that the organization now owned outright for the first time in its history. A \$3.5-million loan from Nigeria-based GT Bank, backed by a program-related deposit from the Skoll Foundation, for the purchase had finally been executed after more than two years of negotiation.² It was, by any reasonable measure, a milestone.

But Coleman was not writing a press release. The memo in front of her was a request for information. Riders for Health's board, its funders, and its country programs in Lesotho, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, and beyond wanted to know more about the Gambian deal's significance. For roughly two decades, Riders had built its reputation on a single idea: that healthcare delivery in rural sub-Saharan Africa depended not only on medicines, staff, and clinics, but on whether frontline workers could reliably reach the people they served (see **Exhibit 1**). In Coleman's framing—the quote above—the goal was not merely to raise transportation's profile but to fulfill it so thoroughly that it would eventually recede from the agenda altogether, ceasing to be a problem anyone had to think about, the way dependable transport is a non-issue in well-resourced health systems. Riders' answer had been systematic fleet management—training, preventive maintenance, fuel and parts systems, scheduling, and fleet oversight—delivered under a model known as Transport Resource Management (TRM), in which client governments owned the vehicles and Riders managed them for a cost-per-kilometer fee. The new Gambian motorcycles marked the formal emergence of a second model, Transport Asset Management (TAM), in which Riders itself owned or financed the fleet and leased it to the client as a full-service solution.

The question now was which model should carry Riders into its next decade. Should the organization continue leading with TRM because the model was flexible, light on capital, and easy to fit into existing

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