



Most of the world's poorest people share two key traits: they live in rural areas<sup>1</sup> and they are women.<sup>2</sup>

Supporting these women in their efforts to gain economic and social empowerment – by bolstering their access to resources and services and their agency to use those resources and services – is critical to helping them realize their fundamental human rights. It is also an economic necessity if communities and nations are to achieve sustainable and inclusive economic growth. In fact, a very strong global body of evidence<sup>3</sup> demonstrates that empowered women are an essential precondition for progress towards our development goals including eliminating hunger, poverty, and inequality. Research around the world<sup>4</sup> shows that when women have money and the power to determine how that money is spent, their lives are better, their families are healthier, and their communities are stronger.

**World Bicycle Relief helps rural women access opportunity by reducing one underappreciated barrier undermining progress toward their dreams and our goals every single day – distance.**

Distance amplifies the cultural barriers women face in many low and middle-income countries in accessing the services they need to thrive. Consider just a few data points related to key drivers of women's empowerment:

A majority of the world's poor women work in agriculture, yet research from India to sub-Saharan Africa<sup>5</sup> indicates that they will likely never be visited by an agricultural extension agent nor access quality inputs.<sup>6</sup> They simply live too far from the nearest paved road.<sup>7</sup>

Around the world, 980 million women do not have access to formal financial services – again, distance is a key driver of this exclusion with 22 percent of unbanked adults surveyed saying that financial institutions are too far away to access.

A survey across 14 sub-Saharan countries found that the nearest skilled birth attendant for rural women is, on average, more than 1.5 hours' walk away. It is little wonder then, that a majority of rural African women still give birth without a trained professional by their side.

This distance between rural women and the services they need means they are less likely to have access to modern family planning, less likely to receive prenatal care, and are much more likely to die in childbirth.

These distances and disadvantages compound each other. Together, they undermine women's health, empowerment, well-being, and productivity – leaving women in a constant state of time poverty.

The long daily walk to fetch water and collect firewood is not simply an inconvenience for women; it can impoverish them by leaving them with less time for farm and non-farm labor.

The United Nations has long recognized the potential for the bicycle to sustainably support women's empowerment, poverty alleviation, and improved health outcomes in low- and middle-income countries, **“Cycling provides access for women and girls to water, schools, markets, and jobs that are otherwise inaccessible through available transportation means or walking.”**

*This is World Bicycle Relief's North Star.*



**980M**  
WOMEN DO NOT  
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## EMPOWERING WOMEN WITH BICYCLES

World Bicycle Relief has already connected more than 200,000 women and girls in seven countries with the health, education, agricultural, and market services and opportunities they need to thrive through technical assistance, our gender-sensitive wrap-around programming, and the distribution of our Buffalo bicycles. World Bicycle Relief's approach prioritizes women and girls. At least 70 percent of participants receiving our bicycles are female, and we work to ensure that our programming is focused on rural women's needs, and positions women as capable and responsible community leaders, ensuring they are represented on the community bicycle committees that manage local programming, locally trained bicycle mechanics, and the supply chain of spare parts meant to keep bicycles on the road, serving the community for years to come.

In women's hands, our Buffalo Bicycle is a transformative asset that can improve women's standing in their homes, communities, and their own mind's eye. Our rigorous evaluations have measured the transformative return on impact:

Rural women's business groups in Kenya equipped with a Buffalo Bicycle grew the value of their business **50 percent more** than women in the control group.

Community health workers in Kenya served **88 percent more** patients when equipped with a Buffalo Bicycle to speed their travels between patients and are half as likely to quit.

Farming Educators in Zambia **more than doubled** the number of farmers they visited and trained in sustainable farming techniques when equipped with a Buffalo Bicycle.

Girls in Zambia with a Buffalo Bicycle reduced their long commute and dropped out of school at a rate **19 percent below** those without a Buffalo Bicycle. They also increased their test scores and felt safer and more empowered.

With a heavy-gauge steel frame and puncture resistant tires, the unisex Buffalo Bicycle is designed for rugged conditions, heavy loads of up to 100 kilograms, and grueling daily use in challenging terrains.

Our impact, however, extends far beyond the mere distribution of bicycles. We support communities as they discuss how to best to address the pernicious impact of rural exclusion on women and girls, and the benefits of supporting mobility for women and girls.



## PARTNERS



## ABOUT WORLD BICYCLE RELIEF

**World Bicycle Relief** partners with communities, governments, and the private sector to improve access to healthcare, education, markets, and critical government services for rural communities left behind by current development initiatives. Founded in 2005, World Bicycle Relief has already helped accelerate the journey out of poverty for more than 3.5 million people in 21 countries. When women, girls, community health workers, farmers, and entrepreneurs have durable bicycles, they can access the services and opportunities they need to build a better life.

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