REACHING THE SDGS BY BIKE

In 1987, F.K. Day, his brother Stan and some friends founded leading bicycle component supplier, SRAM Corporation which produces high-end bicycle components including drivetrains, brakes, suspension and wheels. In 2005, immediately following the Indian Ocean Tsunami, Day and his wife Leah, with support from SRAM Corp and the Bicycle Industry, founded international non-profit World Bicycle Relief.

Mobility is an essential element of development strategies. In sub-Saharan Africa alone, there are over 600 million people who walk as their main mode of transportation. The lack of efficient, reliable transportation adversely affects economic and social development in regions where distance is a barrier. In this interview, the founder of World Bicycle Relief (WBR), F.K. Day talks about how WBR aims to contribute to end poverty through the power of the bicycle.

Question: F.K. Day, You told me that World Bicycle Relief aims to empower people, especially in rural areas, with faster and safer transportation. Why?
F.K. Day: According to the World Bank more than a billion people in rural developing regions lack access to reliable roads and affordable transportation—that’s one out of every eight people in the world—including 70% of Africa’s rural population.

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Compared to walking, bicycle riders can carry five times as much cargo in just a quarter of the time. A high-quality bicycle in a developing rural area is a powerful, cross-cutting intervention that immediately improves livelihoods and educational and healthcare outcomes. Our Buffalo Bicycles are affordable, built to last, and can be used by individuals of all ages; they are essential to create a long-term sustainable change in developing countries.

Question: 15 years down the road, what is the impact that you see?
F.K. Day: Philanthropy alone will not eliminate poverty. Eliminating poverty can only be done through solid economic principles. Philanthropy’s role in development is to pioneer ways to empower individual’s fight out of poverty. If those ways are based in economic principles and can be repeated, then philanthropy is doing its job.
Since inception, we have provided more than 600,000 bicycles to students, healthcare workers and others in need through our nonprofit programs, as well as through sales and partnerships in rural regions across more than 20 countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. We also trained over 2,500 field bicycle mechanics.

But what we are most excited about is the positive impact we see in different areas of development that helps people not only survive but thrive. Research shows that with a bicycle, girl students in Zambia boosted their school attendance by 28%, dairy farmers increased milk deliveries and incomes by 23%, healthcare workers in Kenya increased monthly patient visits 88%.

The impact The Power of Bicycles bring best manifest though something that one girl once said to me: "Mobilize me, and I will change my world!"

For example, with her Buffalo bicycle the 17-year old Elizabeth from Malawi is able to help her family with its small business of making and selling a traditional non-alcoholic sweet beer known as thobwa. The bicycle helps her cover the long distance to school and increases the family income at the same time. It’s just one story of many that hide behind the stats.

Question: Having achieved so much, what is next?
F.K. Day: Our goal is to surpass one million bicycles by the end of 2025. We envision a world where distance is no longer a barrier to independence and livelihood. The power of the bicycle is a viable solution in accelerating and amplifying efforts to achieve nine of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals including no poverty, zero hunger and gender equality.

Despite the fact that rural mobility is a systems level issue, it’s often being overlooked. In order to “leave no one behind” we believe we need to embed sustainable rural transportation across the SDGs with bicycles being recognized as an integral and equal mass transportation solution.

We are looking for like-minded partners in order to create inclusive and equal societies. Everywhere and for everyone.