

Rwanda turns to electric motorbikes to drive down emissions

12 December 2021, by Ivan Rush Mugisha



The Rwanda government hopes to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 16 percent by 2030.

When Rwandan motorcycle taxi driver Evode Niyorurema converted his fuel guzzler to an electric motorbike, he had no idea he was on the frontlines of the East African nation's fight against climate change.

"The reason I switched to an electric motorbike is because I wanted to avoid [fuel costs](#), which are always rising, and also the cost of going to the garage all the time (for servicing)," the 37-year-old told AFP.

The firm responsible for revamping his ride, Rwanda Electric Motors Ltd, has converted around 80 motorcycle taxis so far—the most common form of public transport in the capital Kigali—and developed another 200 brand-new electric motorbikes for use.

The project, which is funded by Rwanda's government and the United Nations Development Programme, is part of an ambitious national push to reduce [carbon dioxide emissions](#) by 16 percent by 2030 and a further 38 percent over the following

decade.

In July the government waived import taxes on electric and [hybrid vehicles](#) as well as equipment used by charging stations, saying it hoped the move would accelerate Rwanda's transition from fuel-based transport and "reduce greenhouse gas emissions".

Rwanda Electric Motors CEO Donald Kabanda told AFP his pitch to riders rested on the long-term affordability of [electric vehicles](#).

He said a single electric battery charge could cover up to 60 kilometres (37 miles) compared to 35 kilometres for a litre of petrol.

It costs around 900 Rwandan francs (87 US cents) to charge the battery compared to around 1,000 Rwandan francs for a litre of petrol, he added.

"So if you compare economically there is an advantage for the riders," Kabanda said.

In addition to his firm, two Kigali-based companies Ampersand and Safi Moto also assemble electric motorbikes, while German giant Volkswagen began importing electric vehicles in October 2019 for its ride-hailing platform Move.



Demand for electric or hybrid cars remains low in Rwanda, despite the fact that they cost less than their fuel-guzzling counterparts.

Low demand

Although taxes on non-electric imported vehicles run high in Rwanda—between 40 to 80 percent—demand for electric or [hybrid cars](#) remains low, despite the fact that they cost less than their fuel-guzzling counterparts.

Kigali-based Victoria Motors told AFP it had sold just 37 hybrid vehicles between 2019 and 2020, mainly to NGOs and private firms.

With Rwanda's GDP per capita amounting to less than \$800 according to the World Bank, electric vehicles are out of reach for the vast majority of its 13 million people.

Instead, the government is looking to public transport as the main driver of change.

The authorities plan to convert 30 percent of motorcycles, 20 percent of buses and 25 percent of mini and micro buses to electric power by 2030.

But with few charging stations set up across the country, travelling long distances by electric vehicles is still a challenge, said motorcycle taxi driver Niyorurema.

"They move so well and quietly compared to the fuel motorbikes. The only problem... is that the distance they cover is relatively small."

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