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Why adoption of electric cars is not in top gear

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If you are on the road riding in an electric car now, chances are that you could just be among less than 200 people in the entire country using that kind of transport.

The feeling even get better if you're riding in an electric car taxi because there are only 30 of you out there.

In the next four years and beyond however, this won't be the feeling as electric mobility will have expanded across the globe as the number of fuel-powered cars gradually reduces.

Car revolution is following in the footsteps of other products. Cassettes and compact tapes if you can remember, were once a big deal. Yet just under a decade, they suddenly disappeared at the emergence of streaming apps.

Now, as the world pushes for clean energy to tackle global warming, there is a general consensus that vehicles running on fossil fuel will most likely not survive the technological windfall sweeping across the automotive industry.

Like Netflix, Showmax, YouTube, iTunes among other streaming apps that have been a boon to the movie and music industry, electric vehicles by every indication, are here for the future of modern transport.

Electric Vehicle Outlook report released in 2020 by BloombergNEF noted that electric vehicles (EVs) will hit 10 percent of global passenger vehicle sales by 2025, before rising to 28 percent in 2030 and 58 percent in 2040.

The EVs currently make up 3 percent of global car sales, the study added.

Because of their dependence on clean renewable energy, scientists believe these vehicles remain instrumental in the fight against pollution and climate change – two monsters driven by heavy carbon emissions.

Data shows that electric car sales have been spiralling across Europe and Asia following strict emission regulation compelling car manufacturers to minimise their carbon footprints or face penalties.

The UK for instance, plans to ban sale of new cars that solely run on diesel or petrol in the next nine years.

Nevertheless, Africa – which bears the heaviest burden of climate change – doesn't look well equipped to ride on the new fleets.

BECAUSE OF THEIR DEPENDENCE ON CLEAN RENEWABLE ENERGY, SCIENTISTS BELIEVE THESE VEHICLES REMAIN INSTRUMENTAL IN THE FIGHT AGAINST POLLUTION AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Kenya, the UN headquarters for environment, has less than 200 electric vehicles, 30 of which belongs to an electric car taxi company – Nopea Ride.

Former ICT Permanent Secretary Prof Bitange Ndemo attributes low electric vehicle uptake in the country to unavailability of infrastructures such as car charging booths.

The absence of the right infrastructures, says Prof Ndemo, is keeping dozens of Kenyans who can afford the cars from acquiring them.

Since the first electric car, a Nissan Leaf, was introduced into the country in 2016, there has been a lot of buzz around the vehicles locally, yet the country has failed to attract investments required to bolster the fast growing automotive sector the ICT expert says.

Cities in Europe for instance have electric car charging stations installed everywhere where car-owners plugs-in their cars for a recharge.

The world's leading adopter of electric cars is China which current has the largest stock of highway legal plug-in passenger light commercial vehicle and electric bus development.

They had 3.4 million units of legal plug-in passenger cars towards the end of 2019.

The Asian country also dominates the plug-in light commercial vehicle and electric bus deployment, with its stock reaching over 500,000 buses in 2019, 98percent of the global stock, and 247,500 electric light commercial vehicles, 65percent of the global fleet.

The United States on the other hand, had about 1.45 million plug-in cars, 20percent of the global stock. About the same time, Europe had 1.7 million plug-in passenger cars, accounting for 25 percent of the global stock. Europe also has the second largest electric light commercial vehicle stock, with over 115,000 units, 31percent of the global stock in 2019.

Apart from EkoRent Africa - a Finnish company operating Nopea Ride - which has installed eight chargers in five charging locations in the city, there aren't much electric car support infrastructures worth noting.

"A number of Kenyans can afford electric cars, but where will they recharge them when while driving around or out of the city?"Prof Ndemo posed.

EkoRent Africa chief executive Juha Suojanen, notes that the key bottlenecks keeping many Kenyans and their African counterparts from buying the EVs is mainly the pricing and lack of proper regulations.

Mr Soujanen says that the market for used electric cars has not grown as much, therefore there are no many secondhand cars in the market.

"New electric cars are too expensive hence unaffordable by many people in developing countries," he says.

"Even at Nopea Ride we use second-hand EVs, because if we were to import new EVs they would be so expensive that the Nopea taxi prices would be ten times what it is today."

STRICT REGULATIONS

Mr Suojanen further notes that EVs uptake in Europe has been escalating due to strict carbon emission regulations which is lacking in Kenya.

Few years ago, the European Union (EU) passed a regulation which came into force in 2020, limiting every car manufacturer to a certain amount of carbon emission per kilometre.

The regulation expects a manufacturer who exceeds its emission limit to dearly pay.

Mr Suojanen observes that some few years ago, the uptake of EVs in European countries was just as sluggish just as it is in Africa until the tough laws came in.

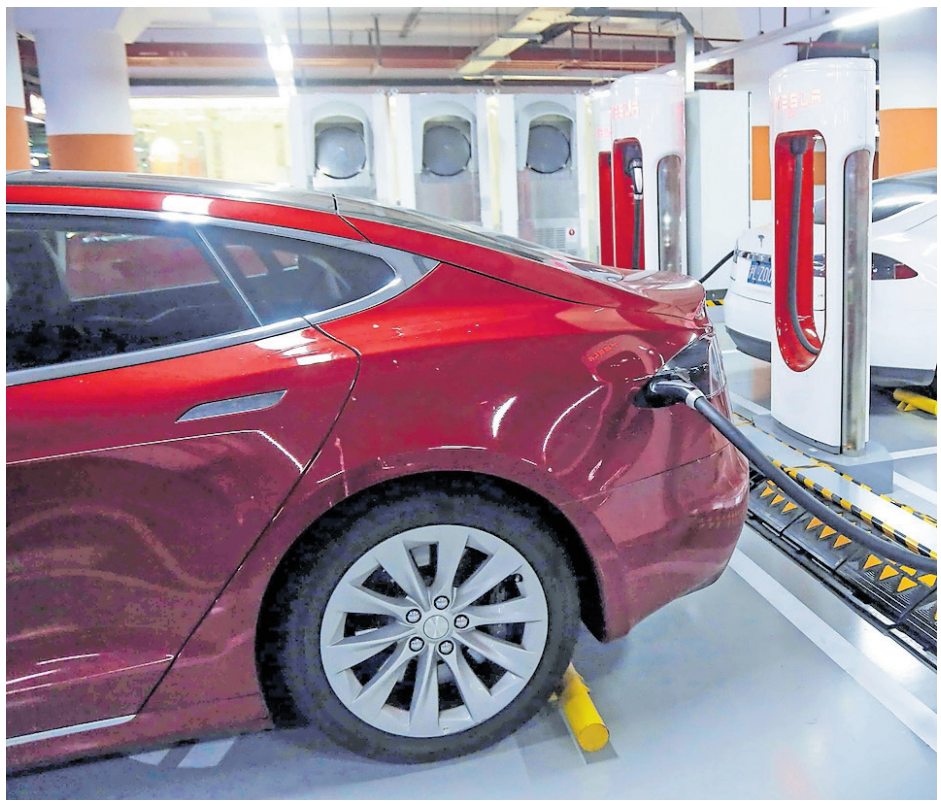
"Car manufacturers in Europe are currently turning to electric cars while slowing down their production of diesel and petrol engine cars to avoid penalties," says Mr Suojanen.

The experts say that lowering the taxes and duties on low carbon emission vehicles such as EVs and Hybrid cars can bolster the uptake of the vehicles locally.

While the transport industry accounts for more than 20percent of the global carbon emission, cars accounts for 12percent of the total EU carbon emission studies show.

But whereas the uptake of electric vehicles seams slow in the country, experts say Kenya is better positioned than many countries because it has already embraced solar technology besides enjoying substantial sunlight throughout the years.

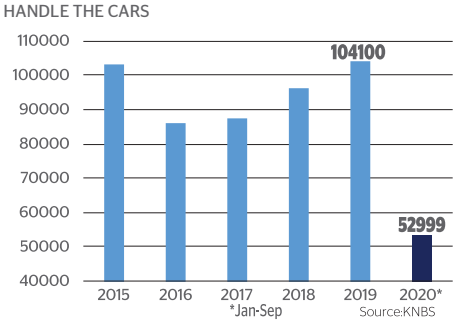
"Instead of using billions of dollars in oil export, the government should tap into the solar energy and build infrastructures that utilize solar energy such EV charging stations," Mr Suojanen said.



A Tesla electric car is being charged at the world's largest Supercharger station of Tesla inside an underground parking garage in Pudong district, Shanghai, China. AFP

Motor vehicles registration

A RECORD 104,100 ELECTRIC VEHICLES WERE REGISTERED IN 2019, AFRICA DOESN'T LOOK WELL EQUIPPED TO HANDLE THE CARS



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