



Press Release

How the electric vehicle revolution provides opportunity for disruptive change for Rural women in Zimbabwe.

20th February – Shaka Hills Farm, Mashonaland East – Today, a 6-month pilot to test electric mobility for rural women, the first of its kind in Zimbabwe, was launched. The initiative, a partnership between China’s Tsinghua University Lifelong Learning Lab, Midlands State University Incubation Hub and Mobility for Africa, along with Solar Shack, is seeking to find a viable way to bring off grid sustainable transport solutions to small scale farmers and rural communities.

The pilot will bring 30 electric tricycles, commonly used in rural China, to rural women in Marondera Rural and Hwedza to collect evidence on how mobility can impact on social development and rural livelihoods. The aim is to collect both qualitative and quantitative evidence that can measure the suitability of the vehicle design to local conditions, efficiency of solar recharging, introduction of a leasing model, ability to improve economic productivity and ultimately livelihoods of participants.

Studies indicate that more than half of the untapped potential for cultivation in sub Saharan Africa is located more than six hours from a major market, and less than 40 percent of rural Africans live within 2 kilometers of an all-season road—by far the lowest level of rural accessibility in the developing world.

Ten students from China and Zimbabwe worked together to design the pilot and create an online data management system to collect evidence. During that period, the students both learned a lot from each other and worked together in teams on tackling issues such as solar recharging, community engagement and gender, how to develop a viable financial model and how to adapt the tricycles for rural off road conditions.

The student exchange between the students also opened new understanding and friendship. “Zimbabwe and China have a long-term relationship politically and economically. I really appreciate what we have managed to do as students to accelerate the cultural and social interactions to make communities better” reflected Ran Aobo, a 24 year old PhD student from Tsinghua University.

“Working with the Chinese students has been highly educational. We have had the opportunity to be exposed to new ideas, learn from their experience and help us unlock new skills, we never knew we had, said Kundai Takawira a student in electronic communications systems.

“This collaboration and exchange with students from other countries is what we aim to achieve at the Incubation Hub stands for by promoting innovation to create new economic and social value where it is really needed,” said Dr. Patience Siwadi the Director at Midlands State University Incubation Hub.

Rural women spend a larger part of their day walking long distances. They travel long distances to reach bigger markets in nearer town or just around their community where villages and houses are very distant. They also walk long distances to fetch firewood and water, often with a baby on her back and with her only pair of shoes.



“It is common in Zimbabwean culture for everyone to have a place that they call home or kumusha in the nation’s rural areas and countryside,” said Kuda Mlambo, a student at Midlands State University and one of the participants. “Almost every conversation will involve the question of where they come from. For some, this question is an emotional question to ask as it brings back memories of long distances walked and the difficult of accessing basic services and amenities more easily accessible in urban areas that they once lived in and many elderly parents still live.”

“The aim of this initiative is ambitious yet we believe that by providing mobility solutions targeted to rural women the aim is to improve their economic productivity without significant recurring costs,” said Felicity Tawangwa, the Director Mobility for Africa. “This is a social enterprise that aims to partner with China to introduce electric tricycles whose batteries are recharged using solar energy - an abundant resource in Zimbabwe. We believe that by transforming the way women move in rural areas from point A to point B, productivity will increase and the quality of life in rural life can be improved. We believe in the local saying “musha mukadzi” which means “a home is what it is because of the woman”.