MAKING THE CASE

Zimbabwe

Case Studies on Inclusive Economic Development

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Background

1.1 Context

Zimbabwe is a lower-middle-income country in Southeast Africa, with GDP expanding by 6.1% in 2022 and 5.3% in 2023, driven by agriculture, mining, and services. The country possesses abundant natural resources and a highly educated workforce, providing a solid foundation for future development. While the economy has grown rapidly over the past years, productivity has been significantly hindered by climate change impacts, insufficient infrastructure, and unequal access to resources.

The lack of reliable transport options also affects access to essential services such as healthcare and education, further entrenching inequality. Women, who are often responsible for household chores and small-scale farming, are disproportionately impacted. They spend considerable time and effort on tasks like fetching water and firewood, limiting their participation in economic activities, and perpetuating gender disparities.

Addressing these mobility challenges is crucial for fostering an equitable economic environment. Initiatives like Mobility for Africa (MFA) offer sustainable transportation solutions tailored to rural settings, enabling women to transport goods efficiently, access markets, and reduce time spent on domestic chores, thereby enhancing their economic participation and improving livelihoods. By improving rural mobility, Zimbabwe can unlock the economic potential of its rural population, promote gender equality, and work towards a more inclusive economy.

1.2 How is a More Equitable Economic Environment Being Built?

To help address many of the region's pressing economic concerns and to leverage more robust transportation infrastructure to address them, Zimbabwe has embarked on a plan to improve access. The National Electric Mobility Policy Framework and Roadmap (NEMPFR) is a central document that helps motivate this. It outlines various incentive mechanisms to increase both electrification and transportation access, in addition to economic reform measures with 2030 goals (Gebrehiwot, 2024).

First, the policy outlines a series of standards or mechanisms to develop standards for electric vehicle (EV) safety and quality, mechanisms of domestic R&D, design, and manufacturing capacity building, as well as grid management to ensure the

electricity supply is able to undertake the burden of increasing EVs (Bloeman et al., 2022). This is all to ensure that Zimbabwean society can both include foreign and develop domestic electric vehicles that meet consumer and business needs, while also supporting domestic economic and technological development (Chivhenge et al., 2023).

A second feature is incentivization schemes to encourage EV adoption. A prominent feature is a 20% subsidy for the purchase of a wide range of electric vehicles, including automobiles, buses, and smaller electric motorcycles or scooters. Additionally, import duties for electric vehicles are reduced, another mechanism to incentivize demand (Bloeman et al., 2022). These demand-inducing mechanisms are tied to disincentives for traditional international combustion vehicles, a factor that will push a strong transition toward environmentally conscious development in the transportation sector (Bloeman et al., 2022).

To ensure greater success, incentives are closely tied to electrification goals for different sectors. These goals guide the completion of incentivization and de-incentivization schemes, as well as economic measures (Bloeman et al., 2022). This results in a robust array of incentives, goals, and methods by which the transportation sector can be evolved and to support the needs of different stakeholders - government, private citizens, as well as businesses - while also decarbonizing (Chivhenge et al., 2023). Stakeholder consultations, including business leaders, were also conducted to ensure the NEMPFR aligns with societal needs and present economic resources, leading to guidelines focused on both consumers and organizations to support environmentally conscious transportation sector development.

In short, the roadmap offers comprehensive guidelines and fosters a favourable environment for private actors to drive sustainable and equitable e-mobility. Specifically, MFA, a woman-led start-up in Zimbabwe, was created under NEMPFR to transform rural mobility as part of the framework's efforts to promote EV development.

2.0

Built For All: Applied

2.1 Pillar One: Equitable Access to Resources and Opportunities

MFA is on a mission to positively disrupt the rural African economy by bringing the electric vehicle revolution to ordinary people, particularly women. Committed to developing renewable, community-based, holistic transport solutions, they dismantle transport barriers that hinder women's access to economic resources and opportunities due to unreliable, unaffordable transportation systems in underserved communities.

Empowering Rural Women by Improving Their Access to Economic Opportunities

MFA empowers women to reimagine greater participation in productive economic activities by alleviating their household burden. In Zimbabwe, restrictive transportation systems and unequal domestic responsibilities placed on women often impede their full engagement in economic pursuits. MFA is changing the game by transforming mobility in rural areas. Their innovative transportation service, e-tricycles known locally as 'Hambas', is specifically designed for rural roads and women, and can travel up to 100km on a single charge, while carrying up to 400kg without a straddle bar (Infra Co Africa, n.d.). This service not only provides women with a safer, more reliable, and cleaner mode of transportation but also saves them time in mundane household tasks such as carrying firewood and fetching water. This, in turn, allows women to dedicate more time to other productive economic activities, such as farming, handicraft production, and small businesses (Red Social Innovation, 2023). More notably, Hambas opens economic opportunities for women by allowing them to earn an income transporting passengers or taking their agricultural produce to local markets that were previously unreachable on foot. With MFA's efforts, women in rural communities now have better access to commercial markets and essential services such as education and healthcare, leading to more sustained rural economic activity and improved economic prospects for smallholder farmers and entrepreneurs.

> *"Mobility for Africa's training and the idea of 'putting women in the driver's seat,' has really empowered me as a woman! Now, I get respect that I never thought I would get."*
>
> Adefi Mtambo (Mobility for Africa, n.d.)

Equitable Opportunities for All

Beyond leasing Hambas, MFA offers a comprehensive package of mobility solutions for rural women. This includes driver's training courses to ensure that rural women are equipped with the necessary skills to operate the tricycles, systems for repairs and maintenance to keep the vehicles in good working condition, and community engagement and capacity-building initiatives to boost confidence in driving and empower local technicians with the knowledge to assemble and repair the vehicle (Mobility for Africa, n.d.). The company, therefore, helps promote equal economic opportunities for all individuals, regardless of gender or background, by leveling the playing field and breaking down systemic barriers.

Lessons for Action

Access to markets is essential for economic advancement as it allows for the sale of products and services and generates income. MFA creates the pathway for economic inclusion for rural women by breaking down the longstanding transportation barriers, enabling them to contribute to the local economy through more productive means. In the future, rural mobility will remain a critical catalyst in empowering diverse individuals to engage in economic activities, leading to more gender equality and sustained rural development in Africa.

2.2 Pillar Two: A Level Playing Field for Work and Competition

Strengths

MFA exemplifies how targeted interventions can promote gender equality and economic growth by providing Hambas to women in rural Zimbabwe. Addressing critical mobility issues, this initiative fosters a level playing field for work and greater economic opportunities while supporting Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

MFA directly generates jobs across renewable energy, battery production, and vehicle maintenance through the Hamba fleet. By establishing solar-powered charging stations and increasing battery production, the project supports local economic stability and skills development. Aligning with SDG 8, MFA employs 15 local staff and supports 63 local entrepreneurs, advancing Zimbabwe’s green economy (Mobility for Africa, n.d.).

For rural women, Hambas bring transformative effects on economic activities. Burdened by various responsibilities, these women face challenges in accessing markets and income-generating opportunities. Hambas address this by reducing time spent on chores, allowing women to engage in productive work. Enhanced mobility has allowed women to launch new businesses, expand production, and increase sales, contributing to local economies. In Wedza, 172 women have been trained to drive Hambas, with some finding new employment as transport and logistics drivers, further boosting local livelihoods (Mobility for Africa, n.d.).

Future Opportunities

The success of the MFA initiative in Zimbabwe opens numerous opportunities to level the playing field for work and further enhance its impact. By expanding the Hamba fleet and increasing solar-powered charging stations, the project can create more jobs in renewable energy, battery production, and vehicle maintenance, strengthening the local economy and developing skills. Scaling the project to other regions in Zimbabwe and neighboring countries can replicate the positive outcomes seen in Wedza. Training more women to drive Hambas and employing them in transport and logistics will significantly boost local livelihoods and promote gender equality.

Furthermore, investment in infrastructure, such as improved roads and additional charging stations, will enhance the project's benefits. Improved transportation access will support economic activities and improve access to healthcare and education, creating a more equitable economic environment. Lastly, leveraging the project's success to attract funding and partnerships will enable larger-scale interventions, promoting sustainable development, strengthening livelihoods, promoting an inclusive economy and fostering fair competition rooted in capability over accessibility constraints.

2.3 Pillar Three: Collective Stewardship of Shared Resources for Future Generations

Strengths

The business model of MFA contributes to intergenerational equity by delivering transportation infrastructure that is able to help its users today while conserving natural resources and environmental health for generations to come. Its e-tricycles

are inherently focused on solving the problems of modern urban mobility while minimizing environmental impact through its integrated charging system and innovative battery pack. Moreover, the company has systems for repairs and maintenance in place to increase the durability of its bikes and promote responsible use of resources (Mobility for Africa, n.d.). Such characteristics line up directly with the emphasis of Pilar Three on upholding environmental responsibility toward future generations.

Future Opportunities

Improving the inclusion of MFA's operations may be achieved through various opportunities. **First**, the company can assess how it can enhance its financing options. It can look into microloans or leasing models, improving access to its electrical-powered tricycles for low-income individuals, specifically women and small business owners. This approach would promote further alignment with economic inclusivity and Pilar Three. **Second**, by expanding its local manufacturing and assembly hubs, MFA would generate more jobs, build local skills, and reduce the costs of its tricycles, also contributing to Pilar Three. **Finally**, by expanding its partnerships with organizations within the community or other local cooperatives, it could grow its reach by managing shared fleets in remote areas. Consequently, this will contribute to these places and their respective future generations benefiting from well-maintained public infrastructure and building community wealth among its residents.

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