

EV innovation winners hold unassailable tech rights

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One of the challenges facing fast-growing African economies is to provide more comprehensive transport networks without huge carbon emissions consequences.



Source: [Unsplash](#)

Between 1990 and 2022, CO₂ emissions from the global transport sector rose by 1.7% a year, faster than any other sector except industry, according to the International Energy Agency (IEA).

To achieve net zero emissions by 2050, emissions from the transport sector must fall by more than 3% a year to 2030, says the IEA. It said strong regulations, fiscal incentives, and considerable investment in infrastructure to enable low- and zero-emission vehicle operations will be needed to achieve these emissions reductions.

According to Energy for Growth, at least 200 million electric vehicles (EVs) need to be rolled out by 2030. Only 10 million EVs have been sold worldwide to date, and those sales have been mainly in industrialised countries like China, Norway, Sweden, Germany, and the United States.

Kickstarting the take-up of EVs on the African continent requires policies and incentives (which have proven effective in industrialised countries) but also financial and technical innovation.

The e-mobility sector is experiencing rapid development of technology. Intellectual property applications, with particular focus on patents, have increased, particularly in countries like India and the United States.

These patents cover everything from batteries to battery chemistry, battery management systems, charging technology, battery testers, inverters, controllers, and autonomous cars. The automotive industry is currently the third most active in filing patents after the telecoms and IT sectors.

Protecting IP

The most successful players in e-mobility will be those who protect their technological innovations by registering patents and commercialising their intellectual property (IP). Key players in the e-mobility market have recognised the need to share innovations with other industry players through licensing further technological development to reduce carbon emissions to achieve a green future.

There is also a need to police and defend these technologies, litigating if necessary. Counterfeiting is a widespread problem internationally and Africa is no different. This is seen particularly in the spare parts industry.



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This underscores the importance of protecting IP by way of registration, having the right commercial arrangements in place with the right partners and acting against infringements.

Careful consideration needs to be given to which countries in Africa to enter and how best to protect the technologies in those countries. It is never a one-size-fits-all. Each territory brings with it different legal issues to be considered.

EV take-up in Africa

South Africa is leading the continent in EVs, with about 6,000 EVs on the roads. In Kenya, by contrast, there are about 350, according to ESI Africa.

Some of the hurdles to EV take-up in Africa are the high costs of new EVs in comparison to internal combustion engines (ICEs), where there is a large second-hand market; the cost and availability of electricity for charging batteries in comparison to more widely available petrol or diesel (which is often subsidised); and long travel distances.

The continent is working towards finding solutions. According to ESI-Africa, "Kenya is making great strides to become Africa's electric vehicle hub". One example is a startup called Roam Motors, which produces electric motorbikes and recently built Kenya's first all-electric bus.

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There is plenty of room in Africa for innovation in relation to batteries (chemistry, management systems, charging technology, and testers), AI and energy-efficient technologies.

Adopting appropriate IP strategies is essential to having freedom to operate, to conduct research and develop without interference from competitors and unscrupulous third parties and to commercialise technologies successfully. IP management is an indispensable asset in the e-mobility sector.

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