Top car brands in Africa go electric against odds

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Toyota brand enthusiasts in East Africa may soon have an option to acquire electric versions of their favourite car models, after the Japanese multinational announced plans to have an electric or hybrid version of each of its models by 2025.

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According to the announcement made last Monday, Toyota is targeting to make sales of more than 5.5 million electrified vehicles, including more than 1 million zero-emission cars by 2030, as it moves to phase out its combustion-only models.

To achieve the target, Toyota plans to start selling more than 10 different pure battery electric cars by 2020, targeting China as its first focus market.

"Batteries are a core technology of electrified vehicles and generally present limitations relating to energy density, weight and cost.

"Toyota and Panasonic will start a feasibility study on a joint automotive prismatic battery business in order to achieve the best automotive prismatic battery in the industry," the company said in a statement.

Reducing vehicle CO2 emissions

In 2015, the company unveiled its Environmental Challenge 2050 plan, which comprised a set of environmental protection targets including reducing vehicle carbon dioxide emissions by 90% from 2010 levels.

Toyota remains Africa's most popular car brand with a presence in all the 54 countries on the continent. In 2012, it sold 237,000 vehicles on the continent accounting for 14% of the market.

In Kenya, Toyota comes second in control of the motor vehicles market selling 1,953 units in the first nine months, compared with Isuzu East Africa's 2,935 units.

Toyota becomes the second major car manufacturer to announce plans to go electric, after Volvo which announced that each of its models launched after 2019 will be electric.

According to data from the International Organisation of Motor Vehicle Manufacturers (OICA), Toyota was 2016s largest car producer, accounting for more than 10 million units.

More time

Toyota's plans to electrify its entire car lineup is expected to shake up the global motor vehicles sales market, in what is seen as the potential confronter to Tesla's control over the electrical cars market.

While the announcement by major players in the auto motives industry including Toyota and Volvo is seen as the beginning of a major revolution towards more efficient eco-friendly motoring, it may take a little longer before their electric cars on the roads.

The development of batteries used by electronic vehicles will require an increased production of the minerals, necessary in their production. Production of an 85kWh battery used by Tesla, for instance, is estimated to consume about 8kg of cobalt minerals.

Importing a secondhand Nissan Leaf - the bestselling electric car - to Kenya costs between $20,000 and $24,000, way higher than the cost of importing most secondhand cars of its size. Further, charging it takes about 30 minutes with a limited travel range of about 120km before requiring a recharge.

A huge gap also exists in the lack of charging infrastructure as many African countries are yet to begin developing charging stations - the most vital support infrastructure for electric cars.

The demand for electric cars in Africa also may not take off in the midst of the continent's power crisis marked by insufficient generating capacity, unreliable supplies, high cost.

In Kenya for instance, electricity peak demand stood 1,727 in November 2017, against the country's installed capacity of 2,336MW.