

SunCycles getting Namibia moving with "e-bikes"

 By Tom Jackson

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"For a country with inadequate public transport systems and a general cultural aversion towards bicycles, the uptake in Namibia has been surprisingly good."



So says Marita Walther, who alongside husband Bernhard founded SunCycles Namibia in 2015. The startup is pioneering "e-bikes" in the southern African country, to great effect.

An electric bike is just like a normal bicycle, but has a battery and motor providing the rider with extra support when going uphill or covering long distances. What's more, the electric bicycle's batteries are solar-powered and can be recharged, for free, by the Namibian sun.



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"Knowing that many people in our environment often spend large amounts of their disposable income on energy and mobility, we decided to provide a solution that could cater to those needs," Walther said.

SunCycles rolls out its product by providing modified shipping containers – retrofitted with batteries, solar modules, solar home systems, electric bikes and electric scooters – to local entrepreneurs. Customisable to suit any electricity or transport need, these SolarHubs are run as independent economic entities to support the community's daily needs.

“Our solution combines knowledge and skills from a local workforce, taking a holistic approach to supporting local entrepreneurs. With solar and mobility services that can be resold at affordable prices to the community, it aims to strengthen independency from fossil fuels and multinational corporations,” said Walther.

The self-funded company has been working in partnership with non-governmental organisations and private companies to co-fund its projects, with Walther saying uptake has been surprisingly good.



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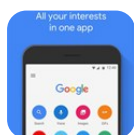


“We support a growing number of local tourism establishments with eco-friendly sightseeing alternatives, offer e-bike technology all over the country, have provided e-bikes and solar recharge facilities to rhino rangers and game guards in remote stations, and support rural teachers and health workers across Namibia and other African communities,” she said.

Key to SunCycles' ethos is a strong social responsibility towards the communities it works in.

“Because we're a young company, we do not have the financial means to support these projects single-handedly, so we often combine forces with bigger, environmentally-conscious organisations or financing institutions in order to have a larger impact,” Walther said.

“As an example, we've recently delivered e-bikes to rhino rangers working in a remote conservancy in western Namibia, a collaborative project with the tour operator Ultimate Safaris through its Conservation Travel Foundation. We've also delivered e-bikes to kindergarten teachers and game guards in rural areas, in partnership with the Bicycling Empowerment Network and FNB Foundation.”



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So far, the company has delivered around 100 e-bikes in all shapes and sizes to a variety of users spread all over Namibia. It has also delivered 3 e-bike taxis – boda bodas – to a partner project in Uganda. This is just the start of its expansion plans.

“Over the last few years, we have worked mainly at expanding our reach across all corners of Namibia, but also have an established project partnership in Uganda. We are currently finalising the next steps to expanding our solution to neighbouring SADC countries,” said Walther.

[SunCycles](#), which creates revenue through rentals and sales of e-bikes and solar systems, has faced challenges in getting its solutions adopted in its hometown of Windhoek, Namibia's capital, and instead had to focus on rural areas.

“Initially, we expected to have a much bigger impact on the current transport environment in the capital of Windhoek. As residents of the city, who support more viable economic alternatives, we had hoped for more support from the municipality,” said Walther.

“Unfortunately, the process of establishing a non-motorised transport network and infrastructure in the city has proven to be a very slow one and to date there have been no developments to support the move towards more sustainable transport. On the plus side, the lack of support pushed us into pursuing other alternatives, which turned out to have quite a positive impact on our reach across the country.”

ABOUT TOM JACKSON

Co-founder @DisruptAfrica. Tech and business journalist in Africa. Passionate about the vibrant tech startups scene in Africa, Tom can usually be found sniffing out the continent's most exciting new companies and entrepreneurs, funding rounds and any other developments within the growing ecosystem

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