

Driving Ugandan vehicle manufacturing

 By [Lauren Hartzenberg](#) 25 May 2016

Kiira Motors Corporation (KMC) is a presidential initiative for automotive manufacturing in Uganda. The company has three successful vehicle prototypes under its belt, including Africa's first solar bus, and has now set itself the mammoth goal to begin the local manufacturing of proudly Ugandan commercial vehicles.

Mass production is expected to start in 2018 at a manufacturing plant in Mutai Village, Kakira Jinja in the Uganda Investment Authority Jinja Industrial and Business Park. In the spirit of #AfricaMonth, KMC's CEO Paul Isaac Musasizi lets us in on their plans.



Paul Isaac Musasizi

How did KMC come into being?

In 2007, a global consortium of over 31 premier universities set under the MIT-led Vehicle Design Summit designed and brought to market a five-seater plug-in hybrid electric vehicle, the Vision 200. Makerere University, the only participant from Africa, was responsible for the design and integration of the low power electronics and data networking systems. The initiative evolved from an extracurricular activity by scholars Makerere University Engineering School to a mainstream government-funded science and technology innovation programme in 2010 and an industrialisation programme in 2012.

Kiira Motors Corporation was incorporated by the government of Uganda as a presidential initiative for automotive manufacturing in 2014 with Uganda Development Corporation as the majority equity partner with 96% on behalf of government and Makerere University as a 4% equity partner.

Tell us about the company's successful automotive projects thus far...

The Kiira Vehicle Technology Program has developed three concept vehicles thus far. The Kiira EV POC two-seater purely electric car; the Kiira EV SMACK, a five-seater hybrid plugin electric sedan; and the Kayoola Solar Bus, a 35-seater electric solar bus with zero tailpipe emissions. The hype around these concept vehicles has been positive and I have no doubt that the market is willing to adopt them as a solution to their mobility challenges.



Kayoola Solar Bus

▣ ***What is the business strategy in place to make the commercial production of vehicles in Uganda possible?***

Starting in the last quarter of 2018, assembly of vehicles - in partnership with a reputable international OEM will commence. The manufacturing process will begin with a semi knocked down (SKD) facility. Its capacity will be upgraded and expanded to a complete knocked down (CKD) facility over a 25-year business strategy.

The first phase will comprise a low volume assembly shop for up to 5,000 vehicles for the first 10 years of production. During this phase painted vehicle bodies from an existing platform will be shipped in. After an increase in demand, the second phase will support the introduction of a paint shop into the existing assembly shop for unpainted bodies and other sub-assemblies from an existing OEM. The shipped-in vehicle units - up to 15,000 - will be painted and assembled on site.

The final phase is the upgrade of the SKD facilities to a CKD facility with capacity for a body shop with stamping facilities, paint shop and assembly shop for bodies, sub-assemblies and components from existing OEMs - for up to 50,000 vehicle units per annum. At this stage KMC will be operating as a full vehicle manufacturing facility.

▣ ***What vehicles will Kiira Motors be focusing on manufacturing?***

The product mix will include pickups, SUVs, sedans, light- and medium-duty trucks and buses produced for the EAC domestic market and export. The first batch of vehicles will be running on fossil fuels with an internal combustion engine. The Kiira Vehicle Technology Program will continue exploring green mobility technology for Africa with the hope of having vehicles like the Kayoola Solar Bus on the road in the next five to ten years depending on how fast the charging and support infrastructure for EV powertrains can be developed.



Kiira EV SMACK

▣ ***What are the main obstacles that need to be addressed to achieve this goal?***

The policy gaps relating to automotive standards as well as related investment incentive structures will require urgent attention in a tailored government automotive industry development plan. The Ugandan automotive industry's sustainability is underpinned by the development of policy for global competitiveness with manufacturing for export as a goal, not limiting this industrial intervention to import substitution.

There is the need for funding to develop the necessary infrastructure, meet the operational costs and train critical mass of professionals in a wide spectrum of disciplines ranging from economics, finance, marketing and sales, law, industrial ergonomics, manufacturing and engineering to sustain the industry. Lastly, there is limited local value chain actors especially in auto parts manufacturing. The development of the KMC Enterprise is expected to progressively champion demand for these automotive value chain investments in not only parts but also related services.

The Kayoola Solar Bus is currently being featured at the sixth edition of the Sustainable Innovation Expo, which is running on the sidelines of the United Nations Environmental Assembly in Nairobi. Kiira Moto was invited to showcase their solar-powered bus technology to highlight the high levels of sustainable innovation taking place in Uganda.

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