

# THE AFRIBIKE PROJECT

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## ABSTRACT

Afribike is a sub Saharan bicycle project which aims to improve mobility for thousands of people by the use of rehabilitated second hand bicycles.

In many parts of Africa there is a desperate need for mobility to carry out the normal activities of daily life. Travelling to school, commuting to work and transport of goods, are all aspects of life that are greatly facilitated by the use of the bicycle.

The concept of advancing utility cycling in sub Saharan Africa was the brain child of The Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (USA) and Re-cycle (UK).

Discarded and second-hand bicycles are shipped to Africa where these bicycles are rehabilitated via small business enterprises.

This paper deals with the experiences to date and the success rate of encouraging cycling, the creation of work opportunities, as well as the provision of bicycle facilities (dedicated paths, parking etc) in areas where bicycles have and are being introduced.

The Afribike project has four core aspects:

- The skills training program,
- Rehabilitation of affordable bicycles,
- The scholars program, and
- The provision of facilities for safe cycling

To achieve these goals a great amount of time has to be spent with communities in order that the program is fully understood and accepted. The task of persuading various tiers of government to invest in bicycle facilities for safe riding is equally important.

These tasks are however assisted by the fact that the bicycle is the most efficient form of transport invented by man which is also environmentally friendly, affordable and a healthy form of transport.

## **Introduction**

The aims of the Afribike Project are to promote the use of the bicycle, as a non-motorised form of transport, for greater low cost mobility, job creation, poverty alleviation, education and a contribution to environmental protection.

To achieve these aims the project has to be sustainable which is without doubt its greatest challenge. Several NGOs have grouped together to launch this project but if it is not sustainable in the long run the laudable efforts will come to nil.

There are several African myths to overcome or dispel eg. bicycling is unsafe, women do not ride bicycles and motor vehicles enhance status not bicycles.

At Vélo Mondial 2000 (international bicycle conference) in Amsterdam several African speakers presented experiences in their own environment. Apart from the myths about cycling the main reasons for the bicycle not fulfilling its role in Africa are summarised as follows :

- Roads are dominated by motor vehicles and pedestrians
- Riding a bicycle is hazardous in these traffic conditions
- Enforcement of traffic laws is poor therefore motor vehicle drivers generally do not show respect for other road users
- Road surfaces are often poor

The above factors do not create an ideal scenario in which to promote cycling but as mobility greatly improves the quality of life it is essential that all efforts are made to improve cycling conditions.

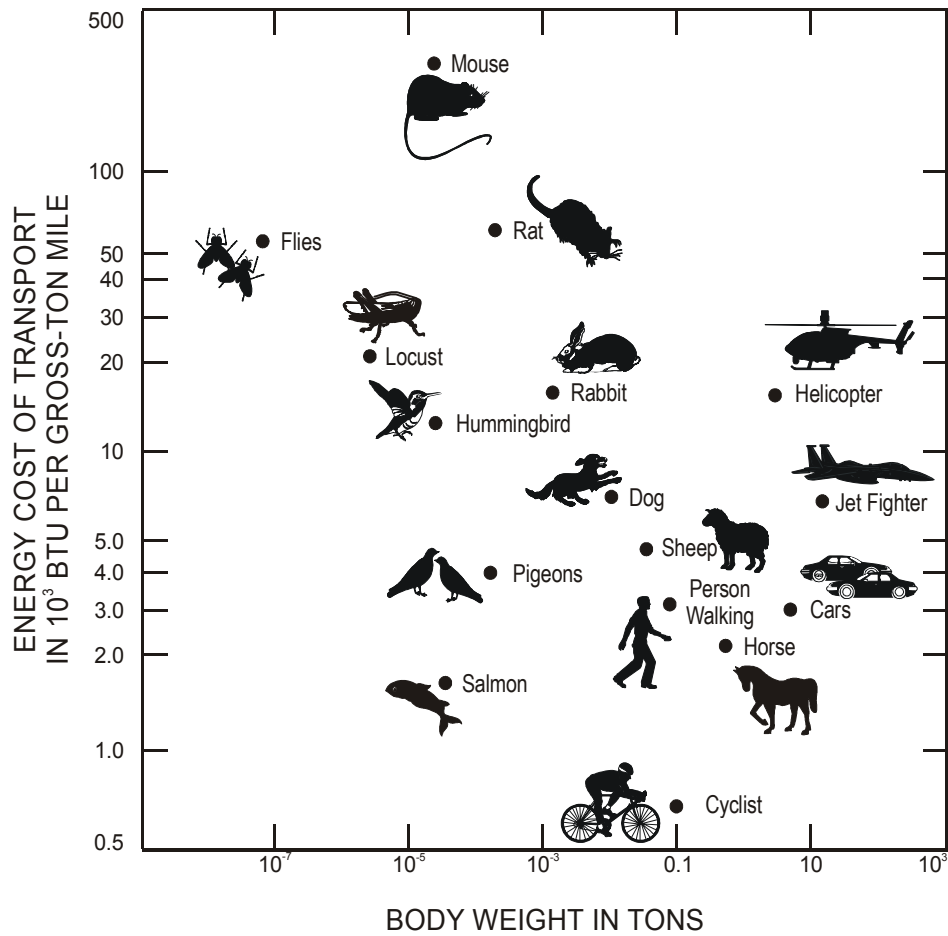
For the sceptics, the bicycle is the most efficient mode of transport invented by man as well as the most environmentally friendly. A look at the diagram on the next page will assist in understanding why the bicycle cannot be ignored by transportation planners and governments throughout the world. Countries such as The Netherlands and Denmark have included the bicycle as an important mode in their transport planning and the success are for all to witness.

### **Afribike**

The Afribike project, which is an association not for gain, was created by NGOs viz the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (USA), Re-cycle (UK) and a number of South African organisations. With its head office in Johannesburg it is slowly spreading its wings to other provinces and neighbouring countries.

Second hand, discarded or rejected bicycles are forward to Afribike from several countries and from sources in South Africa after which rehabilitation takes place. A skills program assists the new owner of the bicycle to understand the mechanics and how to maintain the bicycle. Bicycles are either earned by “sweat equity” or by paying a modest purchase price.

## ENERGY EFFICIENCY



Source : Comparison of the Energy Efficiency of a wide assortment of “fellow travellers” (Wilson)

Afribike also has a specific aim to assist the mobility of school children. There are thousands of school pupils who walk many kilometres to school and back. The mobility of a bicycle will greatly assist these scholars to save many hours per week which could be used more productively.

More bicycles on the road mean more possibilities of collisions. Part of the Afribike program is the provision of bicycle facilities (bicycle paths, parking, warning signs for motorists etc...) to enable cyclists to ride in safer street conditions.

### Achievements

Success is only achieved where there is support from the community along with local authority, provincial and national governments. Most communities see the benefit immediately as their financial input is modest whereas authorities have to assess budgets for the infrastructure required. Rural areas are generally less costly to set up and achieve success in a short while.

The initial Afribike workshop was established in Newtown, Johannesburg where many bicycles have been rehabilitated and many hours of training has taken place. The "Xtracycle" manufactured at this workshop is an extension of a normal bicycle, with the extended section being able to carry loads of 100kg. The Xtracycle has many uses such as delivery of goods to craft markets, transport for reward and carrying of water in rural areas.

Afribike workshops have been created in the Winterveld (near Pretoria), Izingolweni (Weenen) Uthukela (Port Shepstone) and Midrand / Ivory Park. In Kwazulu Natal the Umfolozi and Ndumo Afribike / Envirobike program involves 60 Afribikes and training for use in these nature reserves.

The most recent workshops established are in Atteridgeville (Pretoria) and Langa (Cape Town). On Saturday, 10 March 2001 the Afribike workshop in Langa was launched by the Minister of Transport, Mr Dullah Omar. Minister of Defence, Mr Patrick Lekota was also in attendance and rode the 109 km Cape Argus / Pick 'n Pay Cycle Tour the next day.

The National Department of Transport and the National Roads Agency have formed a partnership with Afribike and under the program named "Shova Lula" (pedal easy) hope to roll-out 10 000 bicycles during 2001 - with many more in the future.

Pilot projects are also taking place in other parts of Africa - viz Senegal, under the Road Travel and Transport program (RTTP) where 150 bicycles were involved, and in Guinea where RTTP project involves 400 bicycles.

## **Associations**

In an NGO of this nature many associations and coalitions have been formed for assistance and especially initial financial support. The World Bank, UNAID, Re-cycle, ITDP, Afrikaanse Fiets (The Netherlands), Pacific Cycles (USA) Pedals for Progress (USA), Bristol Myers Squibb, Osaka Prefecture (Japan), Education Africa, Royal Mail (UK), Safmarine, Raleigh, Derby Cycles (USA), Park Tool (USA), Bob Trailers (USA) Ride Magazine and the Pedal Power Foundation of South Africa, are examples of the many organisations that have and are assisting Afribike to grow.

## **Conclusion**

The Amsterdam Declaration was unanimously agreed to by the 600 odd delegates at the 2000 Velo Mondial conference in The Netherlands. Under the paragraph headed "Call to Action" this Declaration asked governments at all levels to:

- “
- recognise the right to cycle for all parts of the population, including children
  - recognise the potential of cycle traffic in both policies and projects;
  - fulfil the conditions for making cycle use more attractive;
  - make budgets available to fund cycle friendly projects;
  - address cycling issues and
  - establish strategic partnerships with relevant stakeholders ”

The Afribike program - with governmental assistance - can achieve all the above "calls".

Governments throughout the world were further requested to draw up Cycling Master Plans before August 2003. Afribike will assist in this aim in order that South Africa can be listed with other countries who understand the contribution that bicycles can make to the lives of their citizens.

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