



AFRICA

How UK-based clubs are supporting a cycling revolution in Nigeria

What do you do with your kit when you replace it? When your N+1 arrives in the shed what happens to the N-1, does it sit in the corner gathering dust? Many of us have a shed of bits and bobs; used but workable derailleurs, the odd saddle, a solitary left-hand STI lever. The Lycra kit drawer tells a similar story, last season's stuff shoved to the back, too good to throw away but no longer a favourite. But the Kingston Wheelers, among other clubs, has been putting its redundant kit to much better use.

In November 2017, UK-based coach for SportsTest, Dr Garry

Palmer, received an invitation from one of his clients, a Nigerian, to come to Lagos to share some of his sports-science expertise with up-and-coming Nigerian riders.

"Lagos is a city of 21 million people, it is almost three times the size of London, but there is only one cycling club," Palmer says. "The riders I met had little cycling knowledge; they need experienced riders to help give an understanding of training structure and planning so they can peak for

key events, especially the All Africa Championships." That Palmer could help with, but in a country with relatively few cyclists and only a nascent cycling culture, getting kit and equipment was also hard.

On his return from the trip Palmer spoke to a host of contacts including Birdwell Wheelers and Barnsley Road Club and before long clubs and individuals started to offer contributions.

Kingston Wheelers member Andy Edwards heard of the kit

"Lagos is a city of 21 million people with only one cycling club"



Now Nigeria's got technology to support the talent



Crit medals commemorate a historic joint venture



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UNITE

collection campaign from Palmer: "I have a lot of Nigerian friends, so when Garry Palmer told me about his trip I was intrigued. I didn't know there was such a strong cycling scene there."

A partnership is born Eventually a donation system was formalised with the help of Lagos-based Sustainable Cycling Foundation, a cycling development project led by locals.

Meanwhile, Edwards introduced the idea to his club: "It was this spirit of partnership that I presented to Kingston Wheelers. The catalyst that caught everyone's imagination were some pictures of the Lagos Criterium.

"People in the UK responded to the vibrancy of club cycling and racing in Nigeria. It started



Clubs and shops contributed bikes and kit to a good cause

Words Hannah Reynolds Photos Andy Edwards, Inyang Effiong, Klearpics Photography



An SCF consignment's on its way

a conversation that went well beyond the club. Sigma Sports and Le Col contributed, riders such as Lawrence Carpenter, Alice Lethbridge and lots of people I had never even met before. I was stunned."

Grassroots movement
Understanding what was actually needed played a huge part in their donations. "A lot of riders in Nigeria hit the road at 5am to do their training, so arm-warmers and leg-warmers were welcome," says Edwards. "We collected clothing, frames, wheels, components of varying descriptions in addition to donations of staple items such as brake blocks, cable sets, cleats. We collected something like 16 bike boxes worth of kit."

That kit ended up being used by riders like 27-year-old Rita Aggo. She says: "I started cycling when I met my coach [and future husband] Miebaka Aggo in 2008 — he introduced me to the sport and taught me to ride."

Within a year Aggo was competing at national level and has since taken part in international events and the All-Africa Games. In 2017 the Nigerian women's team won one gold and one silver medal in the All-Africa Games — the first time for a Nigerian women's team — Aggo's coach was the national coach in the lead up to the competition.

SCF would go on to run a criterium in Lagos and created fliers and medals with the



Donated kit helped Rita Aggo to compete



The UK-Nigerian partnership points the way to the future

"The support I need most is exposure to racing. It is too flat here"

Kingston Wheelers club logo, as a celebration of the partnership.

But SCF is about more than passing on kit. The project aims to reach young people and give them something to aspire to within cycling; that doesn't have to mean sporting success, but also training to be a mechanic or a coach.

Faiz Imam, a trustee, explains: "All the trustees are members of Cycology, a club in Lagos that started in 2011 and has since grown to 300 members. We all have expensive bikes and equipment but in 2015 there wasn't a wide range of facilities for looking after those bikes.

"We talked about setting up a mechanics' workshop where young



people could be trained and earn a living from cycling."

From this beginning the SCF has gone on to do a huge amount of work with the grassroots: "We organised big events with lots of publicity to get people interested and also established regular local races. As more people came to cycling we took it up another level and set up development teams to help young people begin to compete internationally."

Imam hopes that Nigerian cycling will be able to follow the success of South Africa-based Dimension Data. "We have made it very simple for ourselves by taking that as our ultimate goal," he says.

There are an increasing number of junior girls wanting to emulate the success the seniors enjoyed in 2017, but for Aggo and her teammates there is still a lot more to



Lagos crits showcase the link with Kingston Wheelers

be done for them to realise their potential. "The support I need most is exposure to racing and different terrain. It is too flat here," she says. "If we had the chance to visit other countries and train in more difficult terrain, we would be better prepared."

Closer ties

It's here where the relationships with British clubs may also be able to help further. Edwards says: "Beyond kit collections, I would like to develop a longer-term relationship between Kingston Wheelers and the SCF. This could include rider mentoring, race skills, tactics and rider exchanges. Nigeria is full of talent and the SCF is not short on ambition."

Making the SCF platform more recognised through connections with UK clubs could also help

Nigerian riders get the continental race experience they so badly need. "One thing about Nigeria is that it is very flat, there are no climbs, we have to have big training blocks outside Nigeria or our riders will not be able to compete on an international level," explains Imam.

Edwards would now like to see other clubs get involved as well: "I love the idea of club-level engagement. It helps to bring communities together. There are no reasons why British clubs can't partner with cycling organisations across Africa and other parts of the world."

■ If your club wants to become involved with the work of the Sustainable Cycling Foundation, full information and a contacts box can be found at www.scfoundationng.org

HOW YOU CAN HELP

What next?

If this feature has inspired you to do something with your old kit, Andy Edwards of Kingston Wheelers has some advice.

- 1 **Be an ally, not a saviour.** Africa is a vast continent with many cultures; there is huge inequality but do not underestimate local expertise and resilience. Africa has many stories.
- 2 **Tap into the diaspora.** Many first and second-generation Nigerians live and work in the UK, while retaining strong ties to their roots. This is true of many Commonwealth countries across Africa and around the world. Speak to friends and network.
- 3 **It is OK to do some due diligence.** The SCF were very transparent with us, even providing financial accounts and strategic plans. Not everyone is that organised, but do not be surprised to see that level of professionalism.
- 4 **Look for new opportunities.** South Africa, Kenya, Rwanda and Eritrea are all doing great things, but explore the potential in other countries too.
- 5 **Kit must be wearable and rideable.** When doing kit collections, do not donate what you would not personally ride or wear.
- 6 **Respect local knowledge.** The British cycling community has a lot to offer nations like Nigeria, but we don't know everything. Build a dialogue and ask what is needed locally. Identify what you can contribute.
- 7 **Promote with purpose.** Talk about what you do to start a conversation. Turn outcomes into feedback to demonstrate what is possible and bring people together.



Broadcast success to bring progress