ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGE OF SECONDHAND CAR IMPORTS

BACKGROUND
Every year, millions of used motor vehicles are imported from high-income economies such as Europe and Japan into low and middle income countries in Africa and Asia. Many African and Asian nations are rapidly becoming dumping grounds for these old and often highly polluting vehicles. Stronger emissions regulations in the high-income economies as contrasted with weaker environmental regulations in most of the African and Asian nations often encourage the dumping of cheap, old and polluting vehicles into the global south. Numerous studies already point to vehicle emissions as major contributors to air pollution in most of the middle and low-income countries of Africa and Asia. This trend is likely to exacerbate the mounting air pollution concerns in African and Asian cities, with far reaching health and environmental implications.

Many low and middle-income countries in East Africa, for instance, do not have proper regulatory frameworks to tackle the menace of used car dumping. Some of these countries have experimented different regulatory tools, ranging from age restrictions (e.g. In Kenya, imported used cars must not be older than 5 years), to green taxes based on vehicle age (e.g. in Tanzania and Rwanda used car imports are taxed based on age, in addition to the usual importation taxes). Yet, these measures have not discouraged the importation of high-emitting, used, vehicles. Instead, the numbers of imported used cars is steadily increasing, with used imports making up over 80% of the vehicle fleets in many African countries. While several countries (including South Africa, Egypt, and Morocco) have banned the importation of used cars, rising consumer demand in countries with small or nonexistent domestic automobile manufacturers continues to perpetuate the need for cheap imported alternatives, and prevented similar regulatory action in other developing nations.

THE ISSUE: A PUBLIC HEALTH BURDEN
Used cars often make their way to Africa after they no longer meet the emissions standards of their origin countries. As a result, exporters are merely displacing rather than addressing the issue of air pollution to regions with more lax environmental standards, with dire public health consequences. According to the WHO, ambient air pollution alone is responsible for 4.2 million deaths worldwide, with the large majority of these occurring in low to middle income countries. A litany of long-term health impacts are attributed to air pollution, including lung cancer, asthma, pneumonia, and heart disease. Cars are a major contributor to ambient air pollution, particularly concentrated in urban areas, and mainly polluting in the forms of carbon monoxide, hydrocarbons, nitrous oxides, and particulate matter. The current poor air quality in urban areas, combined with the fact that vehicle ownership in Africa is predicted to continue increasing for at least the next 25 years, paints an ominous picture of their future public health burden.
These public health vulnerabilities are only worsened by the lack of a strong rule of law when it comes to enforcing environmental standards, particularly on a regional level. There are currently no regional air quality regulations or used vehicle regulations, even though the markets and borders are often fluid. To combat this and provide creative solutions, African nations need to harmonize their regulatory strategies through cross-sectoral communication and collaboration. It also remains necessary for the international community to get involved and work to prevent the trade of environmentally unsound vehicles by addressing suppliers.

**Steps Forward**
During the discussion, we hope to get insights from experts in other countries on the following questions:

1. What regulatory (mandatory) approaches have other countries employed to discourage importations of used vehicles?
2. What economic (market-based) approaches have other countries employed to discourage importations of used vehicles/encourage importation of new vehicles?
3. What are the success and/or failure factors in both the regulatory and economic approaches in 1&2 above?
4. What multilateral strategies (global scale) would you recommend to deal with the challenge of used vehicle dumping in the global south?

**Resources**
5. Ambient air pollution in Africa: [https://www.afro.who.int/health-topics/air-pollution](https://www.afro.who.int/health-topics/air-pollution)