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TU eMpower Africa e.V. organised its first "eMpower Africa Night" on the topic, "Social impact driven business and research in Africa – Now and How?", on May 2 at the Garching research campus in cooperation with its partner UnternehmerTUM.

At the beginning of the event, Prof. Dr. Walter Timo de Vries, the scientific coordinator of TUM.Africa, presented the new Africa strategy of TU Munich. Afterwards, TU eMpower Africa e.V. was introduced to the 120 strong audience from research and private enterprises. The non-profit organization was founded in 2018 by researchers, students and alumni of TU Munich. It implements research results on decentralized Energy-Water-Food systems in rural communities in Africa. The aim of the organization is to establish innovative solutions on the ground, which are based on renewable energy technologies, are economically feasible and improve local living conditions.

The highlight of the event, a 90-minute panel discussion, followed. The panel consisted of three founders from green-tech industry, Torsten Schreiber (Africa GreenTec), Florian Henle (Polarstern Energie) and Alessandro Medici (Powerblox), as well as Prof. Dr. Frank Martin Belz from the Chair for Sustainable Entrepreneurship at TU Munich and Karen Hitschke, managing director of Yunus Social Business, a social business venture capital fund founded by Nobel Peace Prize winner Mohammad Yunus. Anurag Mohapatra, the operations manager of TU eMpower e.V., moderated the discussion on the various aspects of the question, whether and how sustainable business models for renewable energies can work in Africa. The participants agreed that renewable energy technologies are sufficiently mature to enable access to electricity for rural communities in Africa. It was accepted that this can be done in an economically and ecologically sustainable way by means of decentralized "Off-Grid systems", comparable to the exhaustive expansion of the mobile network in Africa in the past decade. The panelists, drawing from their extensive experience in emerging markets in Africa, made it clear that there were various ways to acquire investment capital, but that this was more challenging for five- to seven-figure investments than for projects with very small or particularly large capital requirements. Finally, the panelists summarized that social business models, that combine ethical wages, use of renewable energy, repayment of initial investment and perpetuity of the project, can work out as long as they are clearly defined and focus on local social needs rather than European-thought business models for Africa as a whole.