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Transnet leads the push for local entrepreneurial innovation

State-owned freight and logistics company Transnet yesterday unveiled 20 entrepreneurs who recently completed an innovation accelerator programme designed to advance their ideas into sustainable solutions with commercial viability.

Transnet partnered with the South African Bureau of Standards (SABS) Design Institute to establish the Transnet Innovation and Design Research Centre aimed at promoting a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship.

In terms of the partnership, Transnet developed the innovation concept and provided funding while the SABS Design Institute availed technical expertise to refine the ideas into feasible products for the market.

Transnet is South Africa's first state-owned company to invest into locally-produced commercialised products and services.

Transnet uses its 10-year rolling R340-380 billion capital investment programme, the Market Demand Strategy, to accelerate its commitment to advancing South Africa's developmental objectives including enterprise development, localisation, and job creation, promotion of small business, youth employment and skills development.

The innovators gathered at the SABS Design Institute, in Pretoria to showcase their innovations and market their inventions to possible funders.

Young entrepreneurs from all over the country were invited to submit life-changing innovative ideas that would provide solutions to challenges in their communities and some of Transnet's operational challenges.

Commenting on the achievement, Transnet's Executive Manager for Enterprise and Supplier Development, Ms Mmadiboka Chokoe said innovation and enterprise development are at the core of Transnet's plans to improve its service offering and contribute to the advancement of the economy.

More than 1200 aspirant entrepreneurs submitted their concepts, culminating in 20 entrepreneurs being selected to participate in the full programme.

The programme involves conceptual design and market research; trademark/product design and testing; pitching advisory and commercialisation plan; and the development of prototypes.

SABS Design Institute's Gavin Mageni said: "South Africa is losing a lot of intellectual property to Europe and the United States because our country does not invest in innovation.

“If South African companies do not invest in local innovators, these innovators will be forced to look for funding elsewhere, resulting in the loss of intellectual property and potential economic growth for the country. We are grateful to Transnet for this initiative.”

The products and services that were developed through the programme include:

- A cold chain monitoring service to inform hospitals and manufacturers of the temperature and location of their products. Temperature data is collected via a wireless sensor network and presented through a web interface to the stakeholder/administrator.
- A water testing kit that detects the presence of faecal bacteria. The kit is inexpensive and easy to use - requiring minimal training. Colour coded results are quickly available without the need of a laboratory.
- A renewable energy storage system that converts electricity into different storable energy forms. It has the energy density to back up the grid for multiple hours. It is also environmentally friendly and scalable.
- The Star Lab is an all-in-one and self-contained, school science learning laboratory. It is fitted with wheels and is movable from room to room. Work surfaces fold down for compact storage.
- Rust Rid is a rust prevention, rust removal and anti-corrosion spray-on product that chemically dissolves rust to renew metals. It works faster, is more effective, and is also environmentally friendly.
- Bitu-box: a mobile unit to store and transport bitumen in bulk. It can transport 24 000 kg of bitumen.
- Devulcanised rubber converts waste tires into rubber crumb, and then into devulcanised rubber based products. The equipment embodies the latest advances in technology to deliver a top quality end product.

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For media queries, contact Viwe Tlaleane

011 308 2384/083 979 0707

Viwe.tlaleane@transnet.net.