

Grindstone South Africa programme champions green startups, VEZ Technologies takes top prize

VEZ Technologies has been crowned the winner of the Grindstone South Africa programme, the first green programme to empower entrepreneurs in the environmental space.



Image supplied. Fifteen green sector startups participated in the Grindstone South Africa programme, a partnership between the Anglo American Foundation (AAF) and Grindstone South Africa

Started six months ago, the programme is a partnership between the Anglo American Foundation (AAF) and Grindstone South Africa, designed to support post-seed to Series A startups operating within the green sector and provide them with access to funding, market opportunities, and a wealth of knowledge across various domains, including strategy, branding, marketing, and finance.

Fifteen green sector startups were selected, including The Green Cab, Re:HEAT Africa, and Umlilo Green Energy.

Michael Mapstone, CEO of AAF says: "The AAF champions youth to create a green and fair future, and by partnering with Grindstone, we work together to support young entrepreneurs in developing groundbreaking solutions to the region's most pressing challenges.

He adds that these 15 startups have shown remarkable dedication to driving positive change within their communities across South Africa.

"It has been inspiring to learn more about their innovative and impactful work."



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Business fundamentals

The winner of the cohort, VEZ Technology, developed a groundbreaking bioactive toilet paper that is biodegradable and capable of cleaning pipes, drains, and sewer systems.

Director Vanessa Snyman says the company's business fundamentals were lacking before they joined the programme.

“With Grindstone, we strategically created a tier roadmap that serves as a ‘North Star’ for our team. Everyone knows where we’re going, how we’re going to get there and what we will do.

She explains that before Grindstone, they were an SMME, now they are an entity, a corporate, and an actual competitive business.



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Environmental sustainability

Winning shares in Grindstone Ventures, the predominantly female-founded and managed fund, supported by limited partner the SA SME Fund, and a cash prize, Vez Technology’s success signifies a stride forward in sustainable hygiene practices.

It highlights the programme's emphasis on supporting businesses that contribute positively to environmental sustainability.

The programme participants benefited from the mentorship and guidance of coaches, industry veterans and alums.

The programme's conclusion was celebrated with a hybrid celebration event where the entrepreneurs shared their biggest learnings, emphasising valuable insights gained into market sizing, company valuation, and strategic planning that have been instrumental in their growth.



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A narrative to sell

For Neill Human of Re:HEAT Africa, a company that provides affordable photovoltaic (solar) heating systems and storage for water, cooking and heating, their most important learning was the mind-shift from a product and technology focus, where their narrative was on the product, not the need that it serves, and pivoting to a narrative that will sell the product.

For other startups on the programme, including MKGreen Solutions and Umlilo Energy, it was all about the networking and

invaluable partnerships created.



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The green economy potential

Catherine Young, managing partner at Grindstone, highlights the importance of such initiatives.

"The green economy holds immense potential for job creation and sustainable growth in South Africa.

"Our partnership with the AAF is a testament to our commitment to nurturing entrepreneurs who create meaningful job opportunities and build more sustainable futures."

Tangible results

She adds that with the cohort experiencing a significant increase in employment, including seven additional full-time and 13 part-time positions, alongside an impressive average revenue growth of 160%, the programme's results are tangible.

"As our graduates transition into our alumni network, the Grindstone Community, we remain committed to supporting them as they continue innovating and implementing solutions to address local and global environmental challenges."

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