

Seeking local innovations that promote clean technology

If you transform businesses, you change the world. This is the premise of The United Nations Global Compact (UNGC), which works with businesses around the world to encourage transformation that will create a sustainable and inclusive global economy and deliver lasting benefits to all people, communities and markets.



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Gerhard Fourie, Chief Director of the Green Industry Unit at South Africa's Department of Trade and Industry (dti), concurs. "Ten years ago, 'green' solutions were nice-to-haves. Now, they have become business imperatives and form a part of companies' overall business strategies. Industry can no longer afford to ignore the initiatives that lower their carbon footprint, ensure good water and power management, and use products that can be recycled."

"It's not just about complying with new laws and regulations either," he continues. "Consumers are demanding that business and industry do their bit to assist with reducing the power crisis and a looming water shortage in many places."

Global Cleantech Innovation Programme

This applies equally to SMEs and start-ups, says Fourie, highlighting the drive being undertaken by the Global Cleantech Innovation Programme (GCIP).

"GCIP is a global initiative that aims to promote clean technology innovation and support SMEs," he says, adding that the programme is looking for local innovations in energy efficiency, renewable energy, waste beneficiation, and water efficiency.

GCIP combines a competition and a business accelerator programme to offer participants extensive mentoring, training, access to investors, and opportunities to showcase their innovations to the media and the public.

Participants in GCIP can win cash, as well as business support awards; along with a trip to Silicon Valley in California to participate in the Cleantech Open Global Forum in November 2015.

GCIP for SMEs focuses on enhancing emerging clean technology start-ups by fostering a local entrepreneurial ecosystem that supports, promotes and de-risks participating enterprises.

As the best Cleantech SMEs progress through the programme, they are continuously trained, mentored and assessed on their business models, investor pitches, communication and financial skills in order to develop a marketable product that is

attractive to investors.

SA's commitment to sustainable development

"South Africa's increasing commitment to sustainable development has grown over the last 20 years," says Fourie. "We have developed our own national framework to support the shift to a green economy. We have great innovators in the country who often lack sufficient resources to bring their ideas to fruition. GCIP aims to ensure that 'green' is competitive industry-wide across a broad range of sectors."

Recognising the importance of such an approach, the dti, notes Fourie, works with companies and NGOs to turn sustainable Cleantech businesses into viable investor propositions.

There is no doubt that industrial competitiveness is becoming more dependent on how industry deals with environmental issues, particularly from the investment perspective. The Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP), which pioneered the only global disclosure system for companies to report their environmental impacts and strategies to investors, indicated in its [2013 report](#) that the South African private sector had invested R80bn in renewable energy projects in the last few years. "In educating entrepreneurs and SMEs in complying with 'green' regulations while seeking environmentally sound solutions, we see great potential for partnerships between SMEs and corporates, government and civil society."

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