

Netherlands Minister participates in roundtable conversation on Cape Town startup scene

Consul General Bonnie Horbach recently received Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, Bert Koenders, as part of his official visit to South Africa during which the minister explored Cape Town's startup scene at the Woodstock Exchange and met with local and Dutch business owners.



Minister Koenders visit

The Consulate General of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Cape Town aims to actively promote inclusive economic growth and support Dutch businesses by strengthening entrepreneurship and cross-sectoral cooperation in South Africa. This is most evident through its [#cocreateSA](#) campaign, which is based on the belief that sustainable solutions can be co-created by working together.

Equipping SME and startup staff with the necessary soft skills

As part of the #cocreateSA campaign, the TenaCiTi programme was initiated by the Consulate General in collaboration with the Cape Innovation and Technology Initiative (CiTi), in response to feedback received from Dutch business owners in Cape Town. The programme aims to equip junior staff of small and medium-sized enterprises and startups with the necessary soft skills to enter into the workspace after completing their studies.

“One of the challenges SME’s and startups face, is that they have little capacity and often not the necessary skills to mentor young recruits to become effective team members in their company,” explains Horbach. “With the TenaCiTi programme, we empower both the companies as well as their young recruits.”

Ian Merrington, CEO of CiTi explains: “The training focuses especially on the smaller technology companies, mentoring their young recruits to develop into highly productive employees and thus enabling a sustainable business.”

On 12 April the Minister was joined at the TenaCiti Lab by TenaCiTi participants and Dutch business owners in Cape Town for a roundtable conversation. Facilitated by Mignon Keyser, strategic facilitator to the programme, the discussions touched on why Dutch entrepreneurs are attracted to Cape Town’s startup scene and the subsequent challenges they experienced; as well as the experience of junior recruits and small business owners participating in the TenaCiTi programme. Koenders showed significant interest in the “attractions of Cape Town as a business destination” and was “impressed with how the Dutch entrepreneurs were facing their challenges in the local market.”

Participating companies

One of the companies participating in the TenaCiTi programme is the logistics solutions provider Pargo. The Dutch co-founders and directors at Pargo, Lars Veul and Derk Hoekert, stated: “After arriving in South Africa in 2012, we recognised the big opportunity to start Pargo and disrupt the logistics industry. There was a digital shift happening, with a fast growing e-commerce landscape, increase in mobile penetration and improved payment possibilities through fin-tech startups. The missing link was a convenient logistics solution, which we launched in 2015. The last two years have proven that we are on the right track. We have grown the pick-up network to over 1,000 stores and thousands of South Africans are using our service every day.”

Another participant in the discussion, South African small business owner and CEO of Laméco Cape Town, Blyde Wright commented: “Laméco Cape Town thrives on providing local businesses with the technology and experience learned from our sister branch, Laméco Eindhoven. Together with our Dutch team and the amazing work of the Dutch Consulate, we are able to maximise on benefitting the local economy with our services. Cape Town is an exciting place for startups.”

The roundtable conversation confirmed that through the TenaCiTi programme, businesses were able to build enabling relationships with their junior staff and succeed in harnessing staff potential to directly contribute to the bottom line. Junior recruits verified that the TenaCiTi coaching sessions had equipped them with soft skills that include learning how to communicate in the workplace and how to be practically effective in a professional environment. Koenders was interested to hear their stories and congratulated them on their “courageous journey so far.”

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