

# Business accelerator gives KZN chemicals SMMEs a boost

The Durban Chemicals Cluster (DCC) Business Accelerator held its annual Dragons Den-style event in Umhlanga Rocks, KwaZulu-Natal last week. Thirteen up-and-coming Black-owned enterprises presented their businesses to five established chemicals industry 'Dragons' for the opportunity to walk away with cash prizes, seed capital, commercial supply opportunities and mentorship.



Durban Chemicals Cluster Business Accelerator prize winners with eThekwi Municipality representatives and Dragons. Source: Supplied

The Dragons panel was made up of chemicals firms FFS Refiners, H&R, NCS, Sherwin-Williams and Sapref.

Open to all Black entrepreneurs with budding ideas and established SMMEs in the chemicals sector, the DCC Business Accelerator attracted 58 entries, which was whittled down to the final 28 candidates.

These qualifiers were then invited to a one-day capacity-building workshop where they were able to network with business experts and gain insight from them to fine-tune their business pitches. The top 13 pitches qualified for the second round of judging modelled on the Dragons' Den concept.

## Best business case

Klia Business and Technology Solutions walked away with top honours by winning the Best Business Case award and a cheque for R25,000. "It has been a privilege and honour to take part in this initiative and I look forward to the road ahead. Youth development is a real passion for me and this investment in Klia will help me pass the baton on and reinvest in our future," said Jason Govender, managing director of Klia.

The additional R25 000 cash prizes went to:

- Most Promising and Innovative Supplier to the Sector – API Solutions International, represented by general manager Sunthosh Balchund
- Best Environmental Sustainability Solution – Dilex Purification, represented by CEO Itu Rangaka
- Most Diversified Business – AEIM Chemicals, represented by CEO Muzi Dlamini

“I’m blown away by the innovation and potential displayed by these businesses. This event reaffirmed that this initiative truly is driving localisation and enabling meaningful transformation within the local chemicals industry,” said Ravesha Govender, programme manager: economic development unit at eThekweni Municipality.

## Fostering mutually beneficial partnerships

Following the event, the supporting big businesses will continue to foster mutually beneficial partnerships with the entrepreneurs through mentorship, potential investment, loans and contracts.

“Member companies within the cluster are always on the lookout for high potential SMMEs to work with and the Business Accelerator makes it so easy to identify potential partners. Today was incredible – we met some high-calibre talent with brilliant business cases and I, for one, can’t wait to move ahead and start growing together,” says Rudi van Niekerk, regional general manager of H&R Africa and chairperson of the Durban Chemicals Cluster.



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Kyle Ballard, head of the accelerator, says, “We are honoured to facilitate something that delivers meaningful results to both large and small firms within the industry. The accelerator is consistently proving to be an effective way for large firms to find and develop their future suppliers, whilst also optimising transformation in their value chain.

“Similarly, it’s a privilege to be able to facilitate smaller enterprises and have a chance to unlock commercial opportunities with customers they would never be able to on their own. We witnessed magic today, and I am looking forward to doing it again.”

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