

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **2026 GCIP-SA Awards honour innovations shaping a greener future**

A waste-beneficiation initiative that harvests agricultural byproducts and invasive species for sustainable product and value creation won the first prize at the Global Cleantech Innovation Programme – South Africa (GCIP-SA) Awards, held on 19 March 2026 at Gold Reef City in Johannesburg. The awards were hosted by the Technology Innovation Agency (TIA), an entity of the Department of Science, Technology and Innovation (DSTI). They recognise entrepreneurs and innovators who seek solutions for a sustainable future.

Vonnie Projects, founded by Ms Vonnie Baloyi is proof of the possibilities presented by the reduce-reuse-recycle approach. Ms Baloyi's project beat nine other finalists for the coveted sustainable development prize.

Ms Baloyi was recognised for exploring and developing climate, energy, regenerative agriculture and livestock-feeding solutions from what is already in the hands of the rural communities.

Ms Baloyi said: "Across rural Africa, farmers face rising livestock feed cost while rural households face poverty. Growing up, I walked long distances to collect firewood from the forest. Such lived experiences have shaped my commitment to developing unique products. Tokosickle is a nutritious, toxin-free livestock and chicken feed made from peanut byproducts. My dedication to impactful innovation is based on looking at climate solutions that are already in the hands of our rural communities. I focus on unlocking the value."

The annual Awards celebrate such excellence in clean technology innovation and entrepreneurship, showcasing local solutions that address the most pressing environmental – as well as economic and social – challenges. This year, the awards coincided with the South African Innovation Challenge and the South African Innovation Week, with these activities highlighting collaborations across the innovation value chain.

CGIP is a global initiative that promotes clean technology innovation and supports entrepreneurs to grow their SMMEs and start-ups into viable, investment-ready businesses. The innovators benefit from acceleration, training, mentoring, access to capital and markets, platforms to showcase their inventions and by joining a vibrant youth-driven community.

The programme is funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and implemented by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), with TIA as executing agency in South Africa. In 2025 Impact Amplifier joined TIA as the second implementing agency in the country, with responsibility for a cleantech debt fund, designed to bridge the early-stage financing gap for high-impact cleantech small and medium-sized enterprises.

The Deputy Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation, Dr Nomalungelo Gina, congratulated the finalists and winners and handed out certificates and prizes at the GCIP Awards gala dinner. Commenting on the initiative, Dr Gina said these innovators are not only advancing green technologies, but are also contributing to economic growth, job creation, and a more sustainable future.

“As government, we remain committed to supporting initiatives like GCIP-SA that nurture innovation, strengthen partnerships, and unlock opportunities for emerging entrepreneurs in the green economy.”

The Acting Representative for UNIDO in Southern Africa, Mr Levy Maduse, acknowledged the long-standing collaboration that has since 2014 demonstrated excellence and entrepreneurial spirit, and provided direct support for over 250 South African innovators.

Highlighting the role of partnerships in supporting innovators, he said: “GCIP-SA proves that when government, international partners, industry, and entrepreneurs come together, we create impact far greater than the sum of our parts.” He added that the programme is core to UNIDO’s work at the nexus of energy and industry, helping nations shift toward low-carbon, climate-resilient growth.

Calling the winners the architects of new economies, Mr Tyira, Chairperson of the TIA Board said, “Each of the 10 shortlisted projects is a unique story about self-belief, courage, determination and a decade-long journey of risks and opportunities taken to nurture applicable innovations.

“South Africa is not isolated from the competitive international marketplace. The European Union’s Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism will penalise products that are not designed and developed with sustainability in mind. As South Africa – and the world – grapples with energy insecurity, water shortages and escalating costs of food production, these economic factors mean that cleantech is no longer optional. It is central to resilience and inclusive growth.”

Mr Tyira said that CGIP-SA demonstrated that solutions do not only originate from large companies and that people not only innovate to make money – but also to solve broader social problems.

“A winning invention does not have to be small or non-profit. The 10 finalists we acknowledged this evening share a bigger vision – to address African and global priorities. Their success positions South Africa as a leader in the global sustainability movement.

“Furthermore, 35% of the finalists are women-led enterprises that operate in underserved provinces including Limpopo and Mpumalanga. They reflect the real South Africa as it progresses sustainability by creating jobs, industries and markets. At the TIA, we are proud to help young inventors design impactful solutions that restore our ecosystem, retain clean water and close industrial loops.”

Runner-up Phoka M Holdings, led by 22-year-old Leigh Waters-Maine from Mpumalanga, has developed AquaFusion360, a scalable and chemical-free water treatment solution designed for mining, industrial and municipal operations.

Another runner-up, Godisang Spaces, founded and led by Tumisang Maramane from Gauteng, was recognised for its CircularBuild tech-enabled digital marketplace for the construction industry. This innovation tackles surplus material waste by enabling automated matching and reuse of materials.

The first prize included a R200 000 cash injection for the enterprise, with each runner-up receiving R150 000. The top three innovators will represent South Africa at the global GCIP Cleantech Week in Vienna, Austria in April 2026.

***Closing the gap between innovation and impact***

The GCIP is instrumental in South Africa's response to climate change and to reaching the Nationally Determined Contribution targets to reduce carbon emissions to 350 to 420 mega tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent by 2030.

When the GCIP 2.0 programme was integrated into the TIA in 2018, it became a sustainable nationally embedded intervention aligned with South Africa's strategy for development including a just transition, and to regional priorities. Mr Tyira said this was critical for expanding South Africa's innovations pipeline and market access.

“In line with the TIA's 2.0 strategy, this entails moving beyond the piecemeal transactional approach towards curating novel approaches and walking the journey with the innovators from their idea to market. By positioning South Africa as an active participant in the GCIP programme, we demonstrate and further strengthen our institutional systems for cross-border collaboration, investment matchmaking and technology transfer to open pan-African markets access.”