

SA Innovation Summit is important third place for the startup ecosystem

The SA Innovation Summit 2023 (SAIS23), held in Cape Town last week marked another milestone in the narrative of technological advancement. The summit, sponsored by the Technology Innovation Agency (TIA), a branch of the Department of Science and Innovation (DSI), and hosted by the City of Cape Town, served as a pivotal gathering point for Africa's burgeoning startup ecosystem.



“As a division in the agency of the Department of Science and Innovation, TIA is tasked with creating an ecosystem that empowers startups to find the light,” said TIA Acting Executive: Innovation Enabling, Vusi Skosana, adding “we are creating a gateway into Africa, and our partnership with the SA Innovation Summit ensures that these opportunities are made easier.”



South African healthtech startup Kena Health secures \$2.1m funding

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His statement was prompted by the City of Cape Town’s challenge to transform the Mother City into “the go-to destination for Africa and beyond, particularly in the realm of tech and intelligence that drives the desire for success”. Alderman James Vos urged attendees to “push for committed actions” and to use the three days to “find solutions” for the city and our continent.

Africa's premier ideas destination

The week was kick-started with the Von Seidels Cocktail & Connect event, which served as a catalyst for stimulating dialogue and paved the way for a series of discussions and interactions that will further the cause of African excellence.

SAIS23 fostered connections and discoveries that will power the next phase of technological development and allowed stakeholders to see each other in a new light. Long-term partners Vexila and the City of Cape Town deepened their relationship when the City was treated to the full suite of products and unlocked new opportunities to innovate in critical electricity infrastructure.

This value unlock underlines the essential role of the summit as a platform to establish business partnerships.

“If you want to scale a business you can’t do it one customer at a time,” were the wise words spoken by Wetility founder Vincent Maposa in his Masterclass. “You need business-to-business relationships. Capital can be quite shy and those shy investors will have nuggets of information that they don’t share easily – you need to meet as peers.”

Platforms such as the Venture Stage, in collaboration with SAIS partner, Sage, serve as the launching point for forging these connections. Visionary founders use this platform to showcase their ideas, aiming to garner the admiration and interest of potential investors.

Taking innovation to the people

This year summit partner UVU Africa streamed the event live at the Khayelitsha Bandwidth Barn to help empower communities in the space that they occupy.

“If we don’t participate as Africans, there is no incentive for technology to serve us,” said Mindjoy founder Gabi Immelman in response to a discussion about the perceived threat of generative AI.

In his closing remarks, Vusi Skosana challenged the summit organisers to strive for even more inclusivity in future events. “Invite schools and rural communities to come and see the good work that we are doing here.”

He explained that the TIA mandate extends to igniting innovation in the circles just outside the founders and participants in the room. He added words of praise, encouragement and support to the audience that made SAIS 2023 a success.

Thanks and awards

“Congratulations to the award winners, but to those of you who didn’t receive anything, this is not a failure. It was another opportunity to learn. When you win next year, it is because you came this year and did not win – value your lessons because wherever you go from here, you’ll be able to make a better pitch,” said Skosana.

The awards he is referring to are for the various pitch competition winners who presented to judges at the Sage Venture Stage.

SA Innovation Summit award winners:

Inventors Garage:

3rd Place - CT Labs

2nd Place - Wheelchair Doctor

1st Place - SenGeny

Africa Earth Observation Challenge:

3rd Place - Drone Service Niger

2nd Place - ZR3i

1st Place - SnooCode

TIA Pitching Competition:

3rd Place - LIQID Medical

2nd Place - SwiftVEE

1st Place - Water Hygiene Convenience

Boost UP Stand UP Pitch Competition:

3rd Place - PasswordKid

2nd Place - Chemyx

1st Place - Bophelo

(Additional winner - Aria Cosmetics)

“It’s exciting to be among people who believe in the future and wake up every day to build it. We would like to thank all the participants, including industry-leading speakers, innovative exhibitors, and electrifying side events,” said SAIS CEO Buntu Majaja.

“SA Innovation Summit 2023 served as a melting pot where tech elites, visionary entrepreneurs, investment giants, policymakers, and thought leaders came together. We look forward to welcoming you again next year for another unforgettable experience.”

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