

Startups graduate from Drone Start-Up Accelerator Programme

A group of startups graduated from a 20-week Drone Start-Up Accelerator Programme, which aimed to equip the businesses with the tools and skills needed to drive the adoption of drone technology in South Africa and harness its potential to boost employment.



Clive Mathe, founder of KURAI, an agricultural technology company.

Conceptualised and Developed by Mzansi Aerospace Technologies and funded by the Small Enterprise Development Agency (Seda), the programme equipped 13 startups with the skills and tools to drive the adoption of drone technology in South Africa. This Programme was hosted at the Ekurhuleni West TVET College in Kaitshong and was also supported by corporate innovation partners that included Royal HaskoningDHV

The learning journey which started in February 2020 culminated in a virtual Demo Day on 26 June 2020, when the startup founders virtually presented their pitch decks to a panel of judges and investors, as well as guest attendees.

The judging panel included representatives from Development Finance Institutions, Enterprise Supplier Developer funds, startup ecosystem providers including The Innovation Hub, Wits Business School, other accelerators, academia and venture capital investors.

“This has been a great learning journey for the startups, who were excited to pitch their ideas to investors who can help them scale their businesses. Because of the Covid-19 lockdown, startups weren’t able to test their solutions or do market validations with customers – a key part of the programme – but we improvised with the webinar pitches, which were very well presented. Ironically, with Covid-19 shifting the programme to an online platform, it has given us an opportunity to expand our reach, and future programmes will adopt a dual approach that combines online and in-person engagement” says Victor Radebe, founder of Mzansi Aerospace Technologies.

Transforming the industry

The idea for the programme was influenced by two main challenges: the fact that most startups fail because there is no market demand for their product, and that, of the 60 licensed drone operators in South Africa, only one is black owner-managed. The programme aimed to help startups to refine their innovations, with the intention of gaining traction in the marketplace or service that solves specific challenges in various industries.

Gideon Treurnich, strategic business development manager at Royal HaskoningDHV South Africa, said: “Despite the lockdown, we were still able to host training sessions for the startups, as planned, including a session on the use of drones in infrastructure asset management. We also included one of the startups in a client proposal to assist with drone photography in a factory setting. This inaugural programme was a massive success and we look forward to expanding our involvement in future programmes.”

Participants

The startups who took part include:

- **Rine Holdings** offers services and solutions in technical security and intelligence, monitoring, and surveillance services in the public and private sectors.
- **Sovereign Creativez** facilitates online drone pilot training.
- **Pragmatic Master** uses Artificial Intelligence and drones to simplify construction monitoring and asset management through data collection and analysis.
- **Fade Communications** is a production company offering film, video, and live streaming services.
- **Ziyakhipha Projects & Services** is an audio visual and video conferencing technology company.
- **QP Drone Tech** designs and manufactures UAV security monitoring and surveillance solutions.
- **KasieLabs** is a digital skills training provider that also offers drone pilot training.
- **Nafasi Za Angani** is a data analytics company that uses drones to digitise construction sites and derive analytics that improves workflows and efficiencies.
- **Africa Drone Kings** manufactures, supplies, and maintains drones, robotics, and software.
- **Shibus Construction** offers construction, building, maintenance, monitoring, and inspection of all civil engineering services, using drones in smart construction applications.
- **Mgwambani Security & Projects** deploys drones for security and surveillance needs.

The next Drone Accelerator Start-up Programme will be held in Limpopo, Vhembe District.

To find out more, go to <https://mzansiaero.tech/>