Message from the Head of SECO Pretoria, Mr. Daniel Lauchenauer

As another year draws to a close, we are pleased to share our latest newsletter with you. It has been an exciting year, with a number of highlights in the last quarter.

Visits from HQ, in this case from my colleague from the Private Sector Development Unit, are always a good opportunity to meet partners and reflect on our work at a more strategic level.

We also had an inspiring workshop to wrap up our long-term commitment to local economic development in iLembe. The open exchange on both successes and difficulties is important for the future development of our portfolio.

On the trade promotion side, the Intellectual Property (IP) Commercialisation Workshop provided an opportunity to share challenges faced by small, medium and micro enterprises in using the IP system. A major milestone was achieved with the ISO/IEC 17025 accreditation of the National Metrology Institute of South Africa, while our colleagues from SIP-PO supported the South African Country Pavilion at Anuga, the world’s largest food and beverage trade fair.

Last but not least, our efforts to support government, the private sector and other relevant stakeholders in the fight against corruption culminated in the National Anti-Corruption Advisory Council’s (NACAC) National Dialogue with a keynote address by the President of South Africa, Mr. Cyril Ramaphosa.

We are also pleased to share with this newsletter insights to the work of our friends at the Swiss Business Hub Southern Africa.

To conclude this year, I would like to thank you all for the excellent cooperation during 2023. It was great to meet many of you in person and without the commitment and dedication of all of you, none of our work would bear fruit. Thank you, and I wish you a wonderful festive season and a great start to the New Year!

A visit from SECO Program Manager Gisela Roth

From the 6th to the 10th of November, SECO hosted a mission from its headquarter to South Africa. Represented by the program manager Ms Gisela Roth, the Private Sector Development Unit (WEIF) met with key partners and visited various of its projects.

The key areas of WEIFs engagement are skills development, financial inclusion and facilitating a business enabling environment in the country. In line with these thematic priorities, SECO visited, among others, the Tshwane North TVET College in Mamelodi, which highlighted our support of the Career Path Development for Employment program co-funded with GIZ.

The program focuses on the employability of the youth through the Installation, Repair and Maintenance (IRM) Hub model which plays a dual role of supporting the development of an entrepreneurial culture within TVET colleges, while simultaneously supporting entrepreneurial talent and capability.

The Tshwane North TVET College is one of the IRM hubs that provides technical training to students on installing, repairing and/or maintaining tools, equipment, machinery and infrastructure.

It also serves as a shared office space and provides business advisory support to assist entrepreneurs/ SMEs in Mamelodi in establishing their businesses and testing the market.

The delegation visited various workshops at the campus, where students are trained to be plumbing assistants, facilities maintenance assistants (handypersons), welders, and carpenters.

Looking back at a successful 2023

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Learning from the Vuthela iLembe Local Economic Development Programme

The Vuthela iLembe LED Programme has had a remarkable journey since its conceptualization 2012. This quarter, we are saying goodbye to the Programme Coordination Unit (PCU) team as we are starting to phase out the programme. Marking this phase, we took the time to reflect on and discuss not only the many successful results, but also how we have navigated challenges and what lessons we have learnt from this experience. More importantly, we reflected on what could be done better in future. The close-out “Learning from Doing” workshop was held on 2 November.

The Vuthela iLembe Programme was envisioned, designed and implemented as a programmatic approach to local economic development that would support various reforms under the umbrella of five components – strengthening public financial management, improved planning and capacity in service delivery and public infrastructure, support to private sector development, building more inclusive growth and fostering partnerships and improved coordination. Valuable lessons have been learnt for the development of local economies. The discussions during the workshop focused on the rationale behind the design of the programme, and the institutional model that was developed for its implementation, alignment of development partner support during implementation and relevance of the interventions. Participants also reflected on the outcomes of each of the five components and, concluding the day, what could have been done differently and recommendations on what needs to be done in the future.

It is clear that the project stakeholders agree: Vuthela iLembe was a complex programme with many interlinked components and activities, which necessitated the active involvement of many parties to implement and monitor the programme. Local Economic Development can be a complex process that requires effective partnerships not only between the three spheres of Government and between municipalities, but also between the public, private and civil society sectors. Under a common vision and shared objectives, the necessary framework conditions can be put in place to drive economic growth and investment (such as good governance, investment promotion and municipal infrastructure development) while the unique opportunities of the local economy can be promoted and development (in this case, addressing opportunities of skills development, value chain development and enterprise sustainability through resource efficiency). Leadership, both from a political and administrative perspective, is paramount, while knowledge management, dialogue and peer learning should form an integral part of how LED approaches are implemented.

Read more about these reflections on the Vuthela iLembe LED Programme's LinkedIn page.

We at SECO would like to sincerely thank all our partners that have been working tirelessly to make this programme a success, including National Treasury, the KZN Department of Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs, iLembe District Municipality, KwaDukuza Local Municipality, Mandeni Local Municipality, Enterprise iLembe, the International Finance Corporation, GIZ, the National Business Initiative and the iLembe Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Tourism. And a special word of thanks to the Programme Coordination Unit team and Mariswe (Pty) Ltd. without whom this would not have been possible. The programme is not finished yet and we are looking forward to realise various projects planned for 2024.
We look back at a successful 2023

SSAIP-NIPMO Intellectual Property (IP) Commercialisation Workshop

The picturesque town of Stellenbosch served as a backdrop for the Advanced Workshop on Intellectual Property (IP) Commercialization, facilitated by the National Intellectual Property Management Office (NIPMO) and the Swiss Federal Institute of Intellectual Property (IPI).

This collaboration between NIPMO and the IPI exists under the Swiss-South African Intellectual Property Project (SSAIP), which is funded by the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs SECO. The three-day workshop tackled commercialisation challenges faced by users of the national system of innovation, with a special focus on small, medium and micro enterprises (SMEs) and innovators.

The workshop was an opportunity to engage with industry experts and peers with a mix of practical exercises and presentations on topics such as 1) how to create an entrepreneurial mindset, 2) branding and merchandising, 3) evaluating the innovation value chain and 4) IP licensing.

Four Swiss SMEs shared their experiences, ambitions and lessons learnt during an interactive online session.

No workshop in the heart of South Africa’s famed winelands would be complete without some wine tasting. Creation Wines provided a networking event and an informative session on how creative thinking and trendsetting solutions have positioned them among the top ten of the world’s best vineyards and number one in Africa.

The workshop also included a study tour to the University of Stellenbosch’s Launchlab, where student, alumni and technology transfer startups receive support to establish their foundations for growth through curriculum, cohort sessions and 1:1 business building advice.

Due to the large amount of positive feedback received, NIPMO and the IPI anticipate that a second workshop could be held in 2024.

Globally recognised quality testing services to enhance the competitiveness of South African essential oils

The demand for essential and vegetables oils is growing globally. However, for one to be competitive, there is need to establish a reliable supply of good quality oils. One of the challenges that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and emerging farmers face relates to not being able to fully utilise quality testing services needed especially for the export market. Having recognised this challenge, the Global Quality and Standards Programme in South Africa (GQSP-SA) is implementing a number of activities in order to unlock the export potential and facilitate market access for SMEs through targeted interventions along the essential and vegetable oils value chain. The GQSP-SA supports a number of interventions including the development of national standards for indigenous oils; supports testing laboratories to provide state-of-the-art conformity assessment services; provides training on quality management, and promotes a culture for quality in the country.

The support to the testing laboratories is starting to bear fruit. From the three laboratories that are being supported by the GQSP-SA project, the National Metrology Institute of South Africa (NMISA) was the first laboratory to be awarded accreditation to the international standard ISO/IEC 17025, by the South African National Accreditation System (SANAS). The standard specifies the general requirements for the competency of testing and calibration laboratories, this means that the test reports and certificates of analysis for essential oils issued by NMISA’s laboratories can now be accepted internationally without the need for retesting. NMISA celebrated this achievement on 3 November, 2023, with various stakeholders in attendance applauding the institution for the significant milestone.

The GQSP-SA project is implemented by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and funded by Switzerland’s State Secretariat for Economic Affairs SECO. The first phase of the project was from 2018-2023, and the project is now in the second phase that will end in 2027.
SIPPO South Africa’s support to its BSO partners at ANUGA, International Food Trade Fair in Cologne, Germany

SIPPO South Africa recently supported its strategic BSO partner, the dtic, as well as Wesgro and TIKZN with the implementation of the South African Country Pavilion at Anuga, the largest global trade fair for the food and beverage sector. Anuga 2023 exceeded expectations with current figures reflecting around 140,000 trade visitors from 200 countries and approximately 7,900 exhibitors from 118 countries.

The South African Pavilions at Anuga 2023, which were located in both the Fine Foods and Beverage Halls, showcased a wide range of products of the 36 exhibiting companies. SIPPO’s support to the partner BSOs commenced several months before the show, by firstly supporting the dtic for the development of a trade fair strategy for Anuga, to ensure alignment with the BSO’s objectives and to enhance the results of the event.

Following virtual preparatory workshops, SIPPO also supported partner BSOs with their on-site workshops, which were hosted by the respective BSOs, TIKZN, Wesgro and the dtic. At these workshops, a SIPPO sector expert for the food and beverage sector guided the BSOs and their companies on the trade fair participation and the important topic of sustainability. During the workshops methodologies were shared by SIPPO that are gradually being transferred to the BSOs.

The thorough preparation of the exhibitors by the BSOs with SIPPO’s oversight, was particularly appreciated by the BSOs and their companies in that they were better prepared to meet with potential customers, as well as having good knowledge to properly communicate their sustainability efforts to buyers in Switzerland and Europe. In the words of one of the South African exhibitors of dried fruit and other processed foods, “Thanks to the detailed preparation by Wesgro, supported by SIPPO, Anuga was an enormous success for us”.

SIPPO also guided the dtic with the preparation of a comprehensive promotional campaign using social media, particularly LinkedIn, to promote the South African participation at Anuga, which was strongly endorsed by the other SIPPO partner BSOs and companies alike.

SIPPO’s support to BSO partners continued on-site at Anuga with SIPPO’s Country Representative and the international sector expert linking the BSO representatives to importers and distributors and sharing valuable market insights and strategic advice for their companies. BSO exchange was facilitated at the fair for Wesgro with Peru’s Lima Chamber of Commerce and Tunisia’s CEPLEX for exchange on good practices and potential areas for collaboration.

SIPPO’s support for the BSOs will continue after the trade fair with their follow up and evaluation.
Swiss Business Hub Southern Africa: Driving Innovation, Collaboration and Success

Innovation and collaboration have taken center stage in recent endeavors at the Swiss Business Hub Southern Africa (SBHSA). Through a series of impactful events, including ‘EFTA-Connect: Swiss-Norwegian Cleantech Dynamics,’ ‘EU-Botswana Business Forum with Swiss participation’, ‘Green Hydrogen Business Breakfast,’ ‘Fintech Synergies Across Borders,’ and our collaborative German, Austrian and Swiss “DACH”-initiative, SBHSA is actively promoting sustainability and fostering synergistic relationships. These efforts are pushing the boundaries of innovation in sectors such as cleantech, hydrogen, and blockchain.

Export Promotion: Unveiling New Horizons

In October 2023, SBHSA hosted the inaugural Swiss Medtech & Health Mission to South Africa in partnership with the Geneva Chamber of Commerce, Industry, and Services (CCIG). This event provided invaluable insights into the South African healthcare landscape and regional business prospects. The journey extended to Cape Town, where Swiss and South African entities explored collaborative potential facilitated by Wesgro, all within the transformative context of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

Focus on Infrastructure: Pioneering Green Solutions

The SBHSA, with Swiss Global Enterprises (S-GE) and the Embassy of Switzerland in South Africa, collaborated with the Norwegian Embassy for an ‘EFTA-Connect: Swiss-Norwegian Cleantech Dynamics’ event during the IFAT Africa conference in Johannesburg, which featured a Swiss pavilion by Swissenviro. The event showcased over 15 Swiss and Norwegian companies presenting cleantech solutions, emphasizing their commitment to partnerships and addressing environmental challenges.

The Green Hydrogen Business Breakfast, hosted by Wesgro and SBHSA, alongside the DEVAC HYDROGEN-H 2023 conference, highlighted green hydrogen’s potential in Southern Africa and Switzerland. Switzerland, a cleantech and hydrogen innovation hub, promotes sustainability through institutions like HYDROPOLE and Cleantech Alps, while Wesgro spotlights the Western Cape’s achievements in the hydrogen sector.

Investment Promotion: Bridging Borders, Fostering Innovation

SBHSA orchestrated ‘Switzerland Connects: Fintech Synergies Across Borders,’ which was hosted in partnership with Fintech Association South Africa (FINASA), the Economic Development Board Mauritius, the Embassy of Switzerland in South Africa and Visa Sub-Saharan Africa. This networking event delved into fintech landscapes in South Africa and Mauritius, Switzerland’s blockchain innovation, the growing blockchain ecosystem in Africa, and opportunities for intra-regional collaborations.

Cross Organizational Collaboration

A Switzerland-Botswana Collaboration Networking Reception was held alongside the ‘EU-Botswana Business Forum 2023 (EBBF)’. Co-hosted by multiple stakeholders, including the Embassy of Switzerland, the Science & Research Office, SBHSA, Botswana Investment and Trade Centre (BITC) and EBBF, the event explored key areas such as Medtech/health, Fintech/digitalization, and Cleantech/infrastructure.
In his keynote address at the National Anti-Corruption Advisory Council’s (NACAC) National Dialogue on building a corruption-free South Africa on Wednesday, 08 November 2023, President Cyril Ramaphosa expressed his commitment to preventing corruption in the country.

The National Dialogue was themed “Together Building A Corruption-Free Society - Xelela Abanye, Bolella ba Bangwe, Vhuzani Vhanwe, Byelani Vanwani, Tell Others”, and took place at the Birchwood Hotel and OR Tambo Conference Centre in Boksburg, Gauteng. Its purpose was to oversee the implementation of the National Anti-Corruption Strategy (NACS) and to advise on the future of the country’s anti-corruption institutional architecture. President Ramaphosa appointed the National Anti-Corruption Advisory Council in August 2022.

An ethical, accountable, and law-respecting state, business, and society will be the result of the National Anti-Corruption Strategy, a holistic effort by the whole of society. It empowers citizens to hold leaders and organizations accountable by empowering them to be active citizens. It envisions a society in which corruption has zero tolerance and all stakeholders and citizens are committed to fighting corruption. The two-day National Dialogue brought together a variety of stakeholders and social partners to discuss the consequences of past corruption – including those identified by the Judicial Commission on State Capture – and the development of new anti-corruption campaigns.

The Dialogue and the multi-sectoral mobilisation of the advisory council is a contribution to the development objectives of the Constitution and the National Development Plan as espoused through the National Anti-corruption Strategy (NACS). In his opening remarks, the President said, “The establishment of the State Capture Commission was an affirmation of the strength of our democracy. The ongoing work of the Public Protector, law enforcement agencies, the courts, the media and civil society in exposing corruption and acting against perpetrators is testimony to the power of our constitutional order. The completion of the work of the State Capture Commission was a watershed moment in our history.”

Switzerland takes this reform seriously. Through our economic development cooperation, SECO co-funds the Transparency, Integrity and Accountability Programme, TIP, with the GIZ. The focus of the support is on how the fight against corruption can be strengthened by enhancing the procurement systems of South Africa, which is in accordance with the fourth pillar of the NACS. In his opening remarks, the Swiss Deputy Head of Mission, Mr Maurino Cuenat, stated that, “…public procurement is a crucial activity of the South African government. It is a powerful driver of development that enables businesses to grow and to create jobs…such benefits can only be realized when public procurement is fair, transparent, and well-functioning.” He further stated that public procurement is the largest source of government spending – therefore, public procurement is highly relevant to the fight against corruption.

SECO continues to support the government, the private sector and other relevant stakeholders in the fight against corruption. A lot of work and effort is being put forward by South Africans to fight corruption. There is hope that they will triumph.
About SECO

SECO is responsible for the planning and implementation of economic cooperation and development activities with middle-income developing countries, with countries of Eastern Europe as well as the new Member States of the European Union. It coordinates Switzerland’s relations with the World Bank Group, the regional development banks and the economic organisations of the United Nations. SECO is part of the Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research.

Switzerland’s international cooperation efforts as defined in the International Cooperation Strategy 2021–2024 aim to alleviate poverty worldwide, improve respect for human rights, promote democracy and protect the environment. Accordingly, SECO’s economic and trade policy measures strive to support sustainable and inclusive growth. The Economic Cooperation and Development division focuses its activities on its specific areas of competencies and experience in two target outcomes aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: 1) Access to markets and opportunities and 2) Income opportunities. Special emphasis is placed on issues related to climate and resource efficiency as well as gender equality.

Towards a competitive economy for sustainable growth

SECO Team in South Africa (from left to right)
Yayeri Kisaame, Daniel Lauchenauer, Shakespear Mudombi, Seabelo Nyawo, Nompumelelo Sihlali and Gerhard Pienaar