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SBIDZ: Media Release

SBIDZ Energy Transition Webinar: Smart manufacturing integral to reigniting economic growth

- The maritime economy can create a thriving ecosystem for incubating and growing entrepreneurs.
- Smart manufacturing technologies apply to the marine industry.
 - DTIC is formulating a digital manufacturing policy to support the uptake of smart manufacturing.
- More needs to be done to generate awareness and adopt these technologies.

The Deputy Minister of the DTIC, Mr Fikile Majola, praised the Saldanha Bay Industrial Development Zone (SBIDZ) and Saldanha Bay Innovation Campus (SB-IC) for initiating a three-part series of webinars focusing on a just energy transition.

“The ocean economy makes an enormous contribution to the country’s GDP by playing a significant role in generating much-needed jobs,” said Majola. “The maritime economy holds immense potential to create a thriving ecosystem where entrepreneurs can be incubated and grow.”

Majola delivered the keynote address at the inaugural Energy Transition Webinar on 15 February. The theme was Smart manufacturing in the marine and energy sector through a special economic zone lens.

He went on to say that “the webinar takes place at the time the country, like the rest of the world, is hard at work to reconstruct, reposition and repurpose our economy to attain inclusive economic growth” and pointed out that the “Special Economic Zone (SEZ) programme had a crucial role to play in supporting the implementation of the country’s Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan”.

The panel discussion, moderated by SBIDZ CEO Kaashifah Beukes, included contributions from Dr Ajith Gopal, Executive Manager future production: manufacturing, CSIR, Philippa Rodseth, Executive Director, Manufacturing Circle, Lindokuhle Ntanti, Project Manager & Investment Promotion, Coega Development Corporation, and Ilse Karg, Chief Director: Fourth Industrial Revolution, DTIC.

Gopal said, “Smart manufacturing technologies is definitely applicable to the marine industry” and cited the example of how the automotive sector had successfully adopted advanced manufacturing innovations. He pointed out that applying “digital technologies and transformation to make more effective manufacturing and business processes [means] smart manufacturing is a big enabler for local industry”. However, he emphasised that more needs to be done to generate awareness and adopt these technologies.

Karg agreed that the adoption of smart manufacturing technology was slow. She said this might be linked to a reduction in R&D investment and a decline in manufacturing. She also pointed out that smart technologies may require significant capital investments that small companies can neither afford nor necessarily have the knowledge and skills to adopt new technologies to contribute to the bottom line, whilst big companies may find it challenging to adopt new technologies to change production systems at the necessary scale.

To assist with the adoption of smart technologies, the DTIC, in collaboration with TIPS and the Department of Science and Innovation, is developing an observatory for smart technologies to share information with the relevant industry sectors.

Board of Directors

T. Salman*, J. Stegmann,
K. Beukes, H. Boneschans,
J. Ngwenya, J. Smelcer,
H. Mettler, E. Obiri,
I. Esau, J. Brown

+27 (0)87 095 0261
info@sbidz.co.za
www.sbidz.co.za

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24 Main Rd, Saldanha Bay, 7395, South Africa | P O Box 304, Cape Town, 8000, South Africa

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*Board Chairperson

Karg reiterated the DTIC's commitment to formulating a digital manufacturing policy that would establish clarity and guidelines to identify the technological capability that should support the uptake of smart manufacturing.

Rodseth focused on the circular economy and what she termed "industrial symbiosis" – when one company's waste can be input for another company. Beukes echoed this, referencing the SBIDZ green ship recycling project that breaks down discarded vessels into constituent parts and in turn energises the next stage of its life in the value chain.

The vital role of SEZ's in stimulating the local economy was highlighted by Ntanti, who added that the SEZs needed to agree to a unified view of the exact role they played. He said some considered themselves simply as land developers providing a location for business. He believes SEZ's should think a step further than just offering a land solution. They could be a platform for all manner of future developments for smart manufacturing and the energy transition and, for example, recognise the logistic synergies that can be of value to the zone and sector synergies. He pointed out that Coega SEZ had not focused on landing the "whales" but rather on locally grown business.

Beukes commended the panellists and said she looked forward to following up on the deputy minister's invitation to "have a conversation about how to unlock and facilitate the development of appropriate infrastructure required to enhance the maritime and smart manufacturing sectors within the Zone".

The next webinar will take place in April and focuses on Saldanha Bay as a possible green hydrogen hub.

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Issued on behalf of the Saldanha Bay Industrial Development Zone (SBIDZ) by FTI Consulting. For more information contact:

SBIDZ@fticonsulting.com

Innovationcampus@sbidz.co.za

info@sbidz.co.za

Background

Saldanha Bay Industrial Development Zone (SBIDZ)

Launched in 2013, SBIDZ is one of Africa's premier oil, gas and maritime industries and services centre, offering a world-class integrated engineering, fabrication, logistics and Freeport environment to zone users and tenants. It is the largest and deepest natural port in the Southern Hemisphere and has 356 ha space catering specifically to the oil and gas, maritime fabrication, marine repair, logistics and related support services. It is South Africa's first and only Special Economic Zone (SEZ) located within a port. Saldanha Bay neighbours a major global trade route: 30 000 vessels sail through South Africa's waters annually.

Saldanha Bay Innovation Campus

This world-class innovation hub and learning centre is engaged in facilitating and stimulating collaboration between industry, academia, government, and the local community. It incorporates a combination of specialised training from universities, private sector investment, public sector support, and international and domestic industry expertise. In addition, the campus provides support for entrepreneurs as they progress through incubation and acceleration programmes with access to sources of capital funding for ongoing development and commercialisation.