

SOUTH AFRICA

“The training center has changed my life “

When 31 year old Ahmed Mungalee from South Africa became a father three years ago, he wished nothing more than to offer his daughter a better life. Today, he owns his own factory, has four employees and is about to launch his own line of furniture. All thanks to Furntech, a vocational training facility in the wood industry, in collaboration with the Swedish Tibro Training Centre.

“The education from Furntech has changed my life. I’m so incredibly happy to have been given this chance,” says Ahmed Mungalee, who has taken courses in cabinet making and wood machining. He has also recieved help to start up his own business.

He has recently bought a small factory where he has begun the production of several pieces of furniture from his own design.

“The furniture will go on sale here in South Africa during the autumn,” he says.

Furntech started in 2000 when the Swedish furniture company IKEA had plans to locate parts of its furniture manufacturing in South

Africa. The country has one of the world’s largest pine assets, with the potential of becoming a world leader in the woodworking industry. But the challenge was the lack of skills.

This initiated a Sida-funded collaboration with the Swedish Tibro Training Centre to support Furntech in creating a vocational training facility. The goal was to increase the competitiveness of the South African timber industry, as well as to stimulate the growth of new businesses, such as Ahmed Mungalee’s business, through an incubator programme.

“Our task was to train staff so that they in turn could train new students,” says Mikael



“I’m so incredibly happy to have been given this chance” says Ahmed Mungalee, one of the participants in the exchange program.

Hultberg of the Tibro Training Centre, which offers wood technology training, customized corporate training, engineering licenses and other educational services linked to the Swedish wood industry.

Creating jobs is a good way of combating poverty and therefore Sida began to support the project at an early stage. Today, Furntech has seven facilities located around South Africa. Michael Reddy, CEO of Furntech, is very pleased.

“Thanks to the partnership, Furntech can offer the best timber industry training in Africa and our incubator programme is one of the best in the world,” he says.

In 2010, the second phase of the project was launched, with increased focus on design. The project pairs Swedish and South African designers where each pair works together to develop a product.

“The goal is for designers to inspire each other and create a design network. The last group of designers took part in study visits to Swedish and South African schools, which resulted in the production of furniture for schools in both countries,” says Mikael Hultberg.

Ahmed Mungalee was one of the participants in the exchange program.

“Among many places, we visited the Stockholm Furniture Fair where I got the opportunity to exchange ideas with Swedish designers,” he says. He returned home with new inspiration and is already picturing the next project:



Mikael Hultberg with a group of South African visitors at a factory visit in Sweden.

PHOTO: TIBRO

“Our task was to train staff so that they in turn could train new students.”

/MIKAEL HULTBERG

“I would like to work more with recycled materials and contribute to a sustainable society.”

For Sweden’s and Tibro’s part, the project has created a valuable network of designers, manufacturers and trade associations. Mikael Hultberg is very pleased with the partnership.

“We have really connected as colleagues and we can be honest about each others ideas.”

Michael Reddy agrees that partner driven cooperation is a method that works.

“The Tibro Training Centre has enabled us to develop without losing our own identity,” he says.

THE FACTS

PARTNERS

Tibro training center (TTC) and Furniture Technology center (Furntech).

COST

4,294,712 SEK

SIDA CONTRIBUTION

3,520,000 SEK

PARTNER CONTRIBUTION

774,712 SEK

TIMEFRAME

2010–2013

RESULTS

■ Learning materials, assessments, learning methodologies and tools have been developed at Furntech, and enabled them to create qualified facilitators within the wood and furniture industry. 62 percent of the previously unemployed students at Furntech got offered a job after graduation and were still employed two years after graduation.

■ Furntech participates in cluster development at a regional level to establish networks of potential collaboration partners. It has created on-going relationships between South African producers and Swedish designers.

■ Through the participation of Furntech students to the Stockholm furniture fair, Furntech has created a platform to market their own ideas and share production technology. The quality of this can be positively evaluated, through the introduction of new designs in both South Africa and Sweden that cater for both markets but also internationally. The collaboration between Furntech and TTC has generated a production series of furniture for schools in both countries.