

# Astron Energy announces R220m development fund for SMEs with 3 flagship programmes

Astron Energy has announced a R220m development fund to empower small businesses in the Astron Energy value chain and its linked communities.



Astron Energy CEO Thabiet Booley | image supplied

“The launch of the Astron Energy development fund (AEDF) is the next major step for us as a company which is committed to making a meaningful difference in the communities in which we operate,” says CEO Thabiet Booley.

“For us, this is about seeking to create sustainable and meaningful change and prosperity for small businesses in the Astron Energy value chain and in under-resourced communities around our facilities.

“We understand that the micro, small and medium-sized enterprise (SMME) sector is crucial to economic growth, job creation and shared prosperity in South Africa and we are committed to playing our role in this regard,” he added.

According to Debbie Parker, head of the AEDF, the aim of the fund is to support the establishment and/or growth of existing or potential local SMMEs that will create employment as they grow.

## **AEDF has three flagship programmes:**

### **Growing emerging businesses**

Astron Energy will support new or existing small businesses in the fuel and lubricants value chain through the provision of preferential rate development loans and/or business development support.

Priority will be given to beneficiaries from disadvantaged groups, e.g., as a result of race, gender, disability, youth and rural location, but no race group will be excluded. Black-owned businesses in the refinery by-products (LPG and Bitumen) and retail sectors of the liquid fuel value chain are a focus area.

## Small business support

Distress or bridging finance together with business development support for key small business suppliers and retailers from disadvantaged groups.

Business development support extends to training and mentoring in the areas of leadership, strategy, marketing, safety standards, as well as the provision of finance, tax, legal and other services to help establish a firm foundation for each business.

## Growing our communities

This programme is focused on the communities in and around our Astron Energy facilities and those of our key customers.

The AEDF has partnered with two NGO organisations, ORT SA and gold Youth Development Agency, to develop life, digital and entrepreneurial skills in targeted high school students and unemployed youth to empower them towards a sustainable future through greater employability and the skills to become a business owner.

A further aspect of this programme is to support micro-business incubation through grants, the development of business skills for micro/small business owners and the formalisation of micro/small businesses so that they can compete for funding/investment.

According to Booley, the launch of the AEDF is over and above the R100m in interest-free loans granted to small Black-owned enterprises through the company's Enterprise & Supplier Development Fund which has been going since 2015 and remains a priority programme for the company.

Earlier in 2022, Astron Energy launched its SMME portal that assists small businesses to access procurement and funding opportunities at Astron Energy. To read more about the AEDF and eligibility requirements, or to apply for AEDF support, please visit the [SMME Portal](#).

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