

PRESS RELEASE

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Fraunhofer Spin-off S Mile Solutions: Help for the Last Mile in the Sub-Saharan Region

No clean water, no functioning electricity grid, no primary healthcare - a scenario that is not uncommon in remote areas of the sub-Saharan region. The founding of "S Mile Solutions (Pty) Ltd", a spin-off of the Fraunhofer Institute for Surface Engineering and Thin Films IST and the Fraunhofer Institute for Solar Energy Systems ISE, is seeking to change this. The start-up, based in Stellenbosch, Western Cape, South Africa, provides smart, small-scale and off-grid infrastructure solutions that are mounted on commercially available pick-up trucks, thereby enabling companies and institutions to access rural and remote communities with their services and products.

The objective of "Smart Last Mile Solutions", or S Mile for short, is to allow infrastructure-based services along the last mile and, as a result, improve the living conditions and prospects of the most vulnerable communities in rural sub-Saharan Africa. Examples include the supply of clean water and electricity, as well as their storage, the inclusion of hygiene measures and the provision of telecommunications for the establishment of primary healthcare with telemedicine and data-management opportunities in the field.

"As a start-up company, the engineering and consulting company is currently focusing on the provision of self-sufficient preclinical platforms for primary healthcare," explained Dr. Lothar Schäfer, S Mile founding member and former Deputy Director of the Fraunhofer IST. Plans for the future include the expansion of the product range to also support other sectors such as wildlife and nature conservation, agriculture, mining, tourism, disaster relief and research platforms.

Future Plans: Relocation, More Staff and Numerous Fraunhofer Projects

The basis for the business idea behind S Mile was created in joint projects between the two Fraunhofer institutes IST and ISE and the Fraunhofer Innovation Platform for the Water-Energy-Food Nexus at Stellenbosch University (FIP-WEF@SU), in which the first prototype of a self-sufficient platform for mobile medical care was developed. During the foundation phase, the group of four entrepreneurs received support from the Fraunhofer Venture Group and the Fraunhofer Future Foundation. "Thanks to the help from Fraunhofer and the LaunchLab at Stellenbosch University, we were able to develop a viable business model for S Mile," explained founding member Frank Neumann, Team Leader in Photo and Electrochemical Environmental Technologies at the Fraunhofer

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fer IST, gratefully. And this not only envisages a move from the LaunchLab to its own commercial property, but also an increase in personnel. "From the second year onwards, we will be recruiting at least one engineer, a technical administrator, an accountant and a sales representative," revealed CEO Dr. Martin Hamann, who will initially manage the majority of the company's operations.

In terms of content, points of contact for cooperation with Fraunhofer will continue to exist in the future, particularly in the areas of water, energy and health. With the involvement of industry, the S Mile infrastructure solutions are to be further developed, adapted and deployed in the field. "Furthermore, the organization and coordination of field or data-collection studies are also conceivable, for example for the pharmaceutical industry, joint training and further education offers, for instance in cooperation with the Fraunhofer Academy, or the development of joint participation strategies," explained Dr. Joachim Koschikowski, Group Leader in Water Treatment and Materials Separation at the Fraunhofer ISE and fourth S Mile founding member.

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Further information on S Mile Solutions (Pty) Ltd

Company headquarters:

- Stellenbosch, Western Cape, South Africa

Founding date:

- 20th October 2023

Founding members:

- Dr. Martin Hamann, Fraunhofer Innovation Platform for the Water-Energy-Food Nexus at Stellenbosch University
- Dr. Lothar Schäfer, form. Fraunhofer IST
- Frank Neumann, Fraunhofer IST
- Dr. Joachim Koschikowski, Fraunhofer ISE

Project website PRECARE:

<https://www.ist.fraunhofer.de/en/reference-projects/precare.html>

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The prototype of a care unit provides storage space and the energy supply for diverse medical devices, active substances and tests. © Fraunhofer ISE

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The prototype of a mobile supply platform in field tests. © Fraunhofer ISE

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