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Charne is a South African student at the University of Cape Town, nearing completion of a Postgraduate Diploma in Management (Entrepreneurship), she also has a HC in Banking, a BCom in Entrepreneurship and is a member of MENSA International. She is the founder of a social impact footwear startup producing “smart school shoes” designed to integrate cost efficiency and dignity for learners in low income African communities.

Her interests lie at the intersection of entrepreneurship, inclusive innovation and north-south collaboration as a mechanism to correct structural asymmetries in knowledge/innovation production. Charne participated in the 2025 SUNEKO exchange to Western Norway University of Applied Sciences (HVL), where she contributed to interdisciplinary work on bio-based material innovation within an eco-straw concept developed by the cohort. She regards SUNEKO as a meaningful demonstration of how structured learning mobility can re-situate African students as co-designers rather than downstream users of northern innovation ecosystems.

As alumni of SUNEKO she hopes to contribute in the coming years to joint curricula, mobility and prototyping practices which can be intentionally designed to build entrepreneurial reciprocity between universities in the Global North and Global South and to contribute insight from a lived southern entrepreneurship context to the ongoing development of SUNEKO's pedagogy and partnership model.



**Norway reflection:** The 2025 SUNEKO exchange at HVL provided an unusually clear laboratory for observing how structured, short cycle mobility can drive reciprocity between northern and southern innovation ecosystems. Our cohort worked in mixed teams on a bio-based eco-straw concept using mycelium and a seaweed-based laminate as an alternative to the widely-criticized cardboard straw. Although the prototype design itself was early-stage, the pedagogical value lay in the manner in which the northern institutional strengths (process rigor, tooling access, and established circular-economy discourse) intersected with the southern reflexes (constraint-aware feasibility thinking, price realism, and sensitivity to uneven infrastructure). This complementarity was observable in design decisions.

Academically, the exchange highlighted differences in how innovation is framed. HVL's environment privileged methodological depth, institutionalised support structures, and pre-existing innovation clusters. In contrast, UCT's entrepreneurship practice tends to be shaped by structural scarcity, necessitating a default orientation to viability, market realism and social-impact adjacency. Neither is superior; they are asymmetric. SUNEKO's value lies precisely in constructing a bridge where those asymmetries become assets in combination, rather than sources of distance.

Socially and operationally, the exchange facilitated cross border entrepreneurial collaboration. the immersion exposed subtle but important cultural differences in collaboration and communication. Norwegian teamwork norms tended toward distributed calm and deliberation, while South African teams often rely on dynamic iterative talk and adaptive improvisation. These contrasts improved collective throughput rather than slowing it down.

From the perspective of geopolitical knowledge flows, the most significant reflection concerns positionality. Historically, northern innovation programmes have treated southern participants as beneficiaries in a diffusion model. SUNEKO, by design, re-positions southern students as co-producers in upstream ideation cycles. The eco-straw prototype functioned symbolically to invert the usual order: feasibility constraints and contextual realism flowed from the South into a northern prototyping space, shaping decisions at source rather than post-hoc.

SUNEKO showed that cross-border engagement at university level can meaningfully enhance entrepreneurial collaboration, creating conditions where ideas, methods and networks are able to circulate in ways that would not emerge inside a single institutional context

Perhaps the most enduring lesson of SUNEKO is that collaboration across borders does not dilute anyone's strength... it multiplies it! When northern infrastructure and southern contextual intelligence meet at eye-level, both sides leave with capabilities they did not possess alone. True partnership is not extractive; it is the quiet but profound realisation that progress is faster, deeper and more durable when we build it together rather than in parallel!