

The background is a vibrant, abstract illustration. It features silhouettes of people in various poses, some with arms raised. There are stylized plants, including a tall one with purple flowers and a cluster of green leaves at the bottom right. The scene is filled with colorful, hand-drawn elements: orange and yellow vertical stripes, blue and green wavy lines, black gears, and various geometric shapes like hexagons and rectangles. The overall style is modern and artistic, suggesting themes of innovation, industry, and community.

**CiC**  
rotterdam

CIC ROTTERDAM'S 2019  
**IMPACT  
REPORT**

*From the illustrator: Janneke Wing, 27, Rotterdam  
"Colorful, playful, and using a mix of different structures is a good description of my work. I love to observe social situations and translate them into illustrated scenarios. In addition, I love gardening which results in plants making a frequent appearance in my illustrations."*

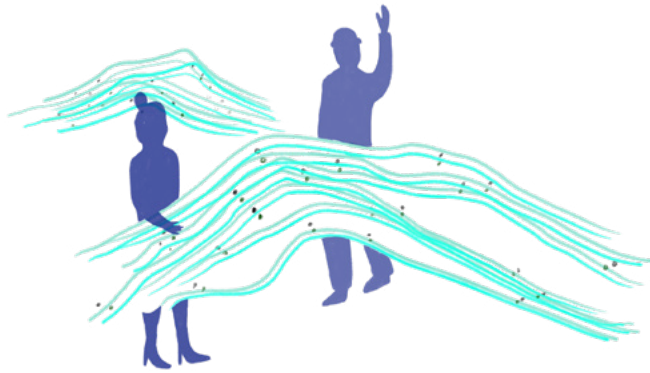
*About her work for CIC's Impact Report, Janneke said: "Being able to play with the environment and CIC's vision was challenging and fun. Walking through the premises and seeing a surprise around every corner has a very stimulating effect, not only for clients but definitely also for an illustrator!"*

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*We sincerely thank all of our CIC Rotterdam clients, Venture Café Rotterdam, and other partners who helped us compile and present our 2019 Impact Report. All data was received through surveying and interviewing, and does not include any information from other CIC locations. Design of the report has been created by The Phoney Club; The stories have been written by Mina Nacheva; the cover and illustrations have been made by Janneke Wing.*

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Dear reader,

We're proud to share our third annual Impact Report, presenting the continuous growth and sustainable impact of our community in Rotterdam.

This report highlights impact in its many forms, ranging from job creation, to funding and social impact. We're impressed to see how CIC clients further shape and change the world through innovation. Read more about this in the interviews. Our takeaway is: no matter how big or small the effort is, it only takes one action to start a ripple effect.

Looking back on 2019, we opened our newest section called Epsilon in March on the third floor of the Groot Handelsgebouw, bringing our physical footprint to a total of 10.000 m<sup>2</sup>. We have grown to a community of over 250 companies, ranging from startups, to scaleups, investors, corporates and other innovative companies. We are proud of our broad network of like-minded people, who see our center as a place to meet, do business, and innovate.

The annual growth in job creation continues at CIC Rotterdam. Last year, no fewer than 690 new full-time jobs were created by CIC clients. Since 2017, more than 1.300 new jobs were created by CIC clients. We are optimistic that this growth will continue.

In 2019, we further increased our focus on sustainability. Together with our community, we did our best to ignite various ripple effects so as to decrease our environmental footprint and increase overall environmental consciousness. We also worked hard to get ready to switch to the greenest electricity supplier in the Netherlands as per the 1st of January, 2020. This change will result in an estimated CO<sub>2</sub> compensation of 293.405 kilograms per year and help to accelerate the transition to renewable energy.

On a personal note, I'm honoured to continue CIC's mission as its new General Manager. Rotterdam, as an innovation ecosystem continues to develop and thrive. We see more startups choose Rotterdam as their home and in that way strengthen the entrepreneurial climate and employment opportunities in the city and region.

I'm proud of the role our CIC community plays to make this happen. We are now planning to open our final 2.000m<sup>2</sup> in the Groot Handelsgebouw. It is an exciting time for us, as this addition will mark the completion of our original vision.

We thank all of our clients and partners for their continued support. A new decade awaits and we can't wait to continue this journey together with you.

Joyce Kornet-Vreugdenhil  
General Manager, CIC Rotterdam

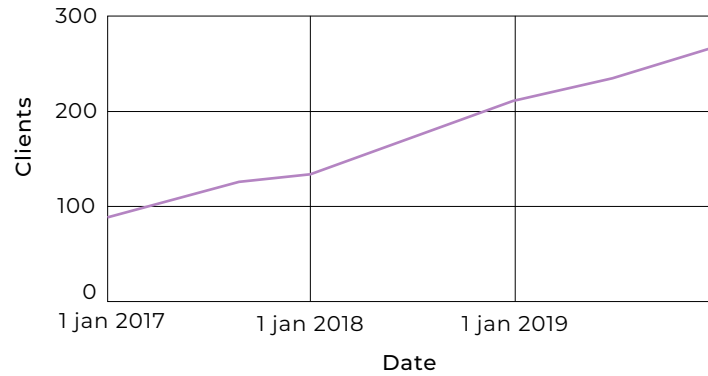


# GENERAL DEMOGRAPHICS

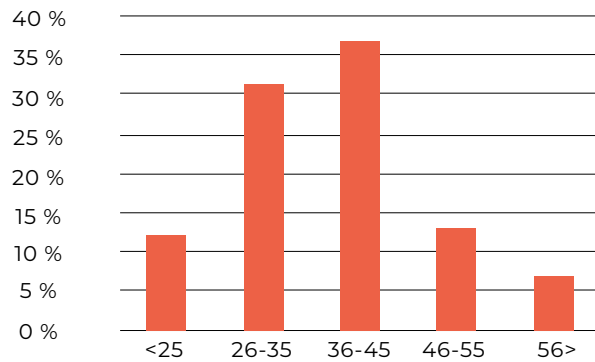
## of CIC Rotterdam Clients

Startups, scaleups, and other innovative companies call CIC Rotterdam their home. We believe innovation can be driven and accelerated by a sense of community. We polled our clients to have a general picture of the demographics and industries represented within CIC.

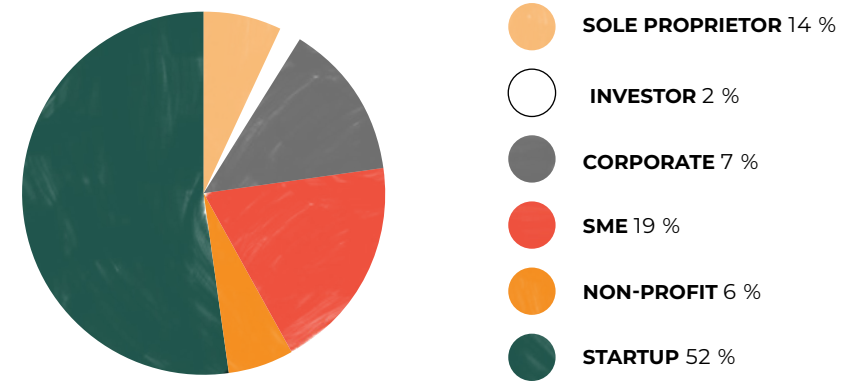
## CLIENT GROWTH



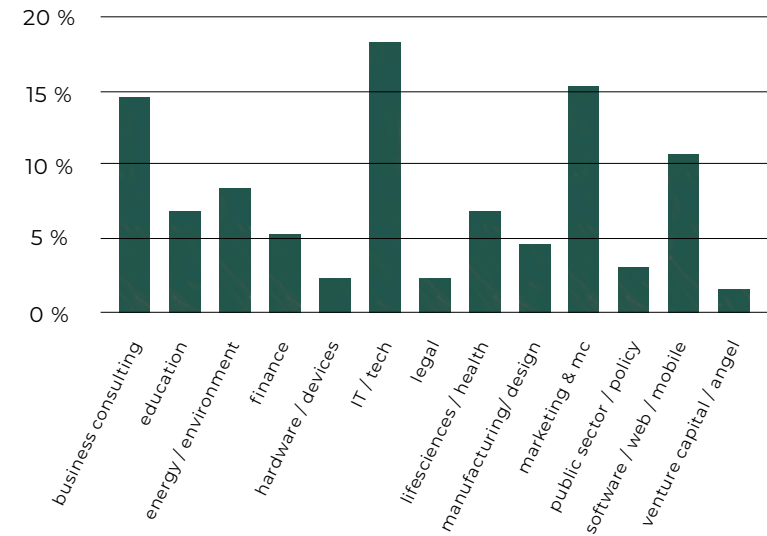
## AGE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS



## COMPANY TYPE



## INDUSTRY



We have seen a significant increase in companies active in the IT/Tech sector this year.



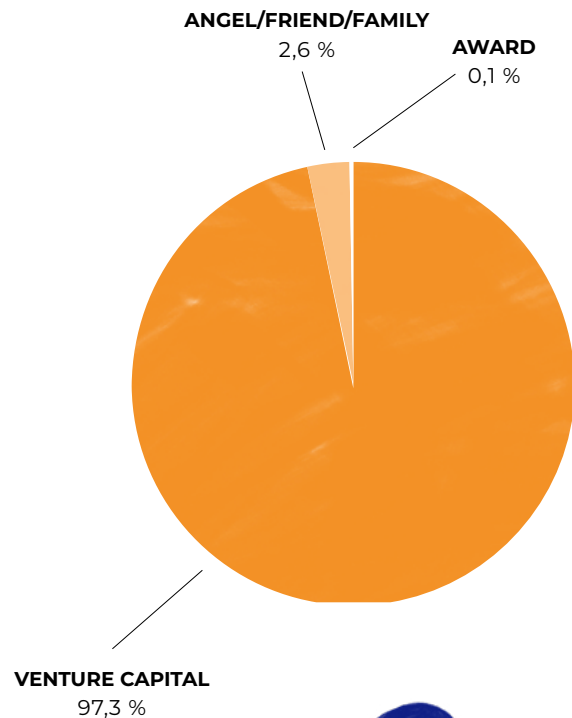
# FUNDRAISING

by CIC Startups

Access to capital and connecting entrepreneurs and investors is an ongoing focus of CIC Rotterdam. Clients shared their funding sources and amounts.

Funding raised by  
CIC Startups in 2019:  
**over €92M**

### Type of funding in 2019



Total amount of funding  
raised by CIC Startups  
during their lifetime:  
**Over €820M**

Total amount of capital  
managed by investors  
located at CIC Rotterdam:  
**Over €364M**





# JOB CREATION

## & International Community

We asked our clients how many new employees in full-time roles they added to their teams.



**690** new full-time jobs were directly created by CIC startups (increase from **535** in 2018 and from **104** in 2017)



Our clients have collectively won more than **20** local and international awards in 2019

CIC Rotterdam is also a strong international community. **14%** of CIC Rotterdam's companies are headquartered outside of the Netherlands



Furthermore, in 2019, CIC Rotterdam welcomed five promising Startup Visa startups working on solutions in hardware, software and AI. Countries represented by these entrepreneurs are South Africa, Pakistan, Iran, and Georgia.

# VENTURE CAFÉ ROTTERDAM

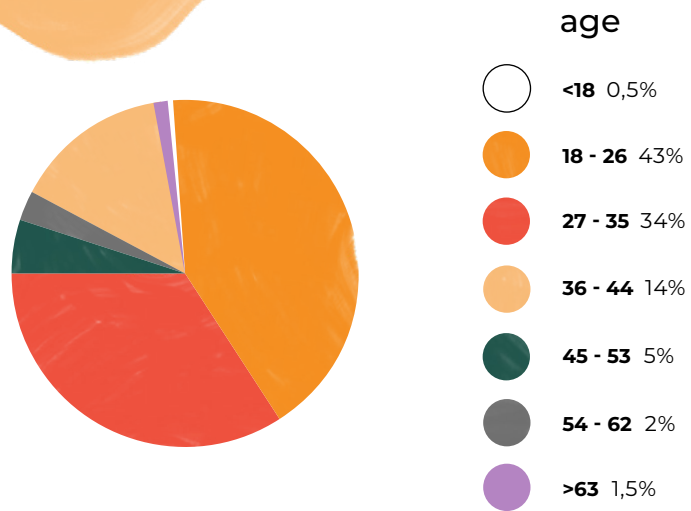
CIC Rotterdam's sister non-profit organization, Venture Café Rotterdam, continued to host an incredible amount of knowledge and inspiration in 2019.

In 2019, **Venture Café Rotterdam** held more than **701 sessions** with **347 program partners**. On average, they welcomed **300 visitors** to their weekly Thursday Gatherings. **Special Talent Nights** became of the program for the first time.

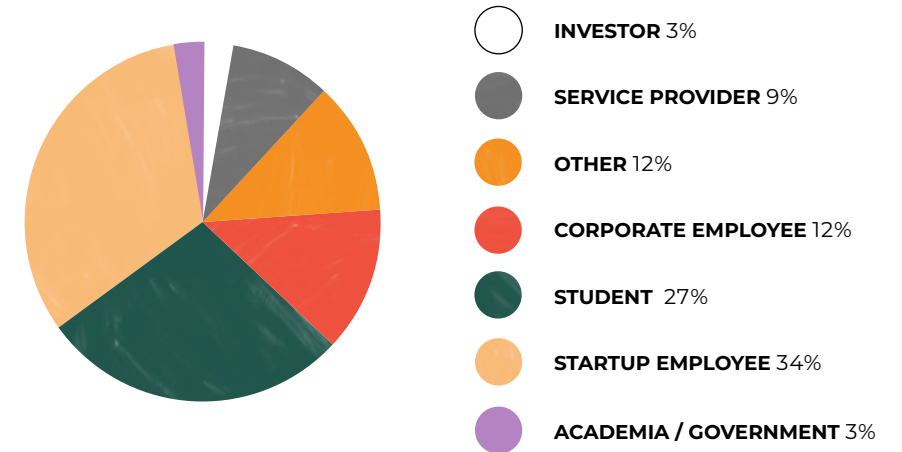
**Talent Portal** (launched in September 2018 to help members of the innovation community find and connect talent) had 70 job postings and 11.000 visits.



## VISITORS DEMOGRAPHICS

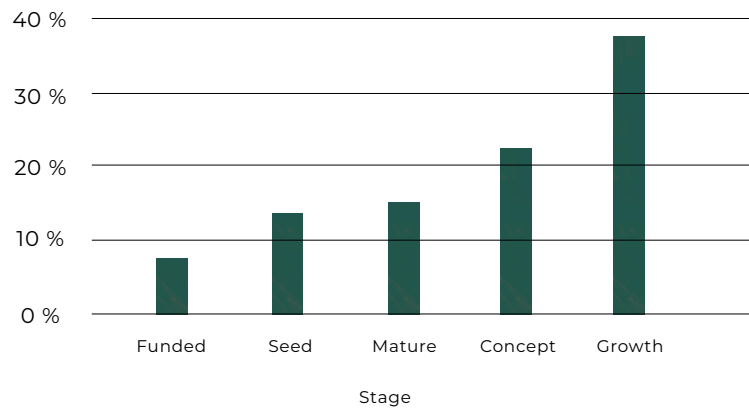


## PRIMARY ROLE IN COMMUNITY



## STAGE OF BUSINESS

**Concept (Early idea / no MVP yet)**  
**Seed (<10 people <1M funding)**  
**Funded (11-50 people 1-10M funding or past series A)**  
**Growth (>50 people >10M funding)**  
**Mature (>150 people)**





# EVENTS

## At CIC Rotterdam

In addition to all of the great activity and attendance at Venture Café Rotterdam's Thursday Gatherings, CIC Rotterdam continues to be a hotspot for events.

An average of 6 events were hosted every week. In total, **300 innovation events** were organized at CIC Rotterdam in 2019.

65% of these events were organized by **external companies** and organizations.

16.895 PEOPLE ATTENDED  
EVENTS HELD AT CIC  
ROTTERDAM

CIC donated more than **€108K** of event space and services to startups, innovation organizations, and non-profits in 2019





At **CIC** we see an increasing amount of companies working on **sustainable solutions**. Meet a few of these promising initiatives we interviewed about their **industries, challenges, decisions and goals** and how they reflect on the innovation opportunities and challenges in **Rotterdam**.



## COREKEES:

# The easy way to going climate neutral

It all started in 2016, in the shade of a tree, on the banks of the Paraguay River.

Nick van Heesewijk was on a holiday, visiting family in Brazil, when his uncle told him that he was planning to start his own business in agriculture. Curious, Nick decided to take a look. Without realizing what he was up for, he ended up making quite the journey to a farm dedicated to growing a specific type of tree: the Pongamia.

“Getting to the site was an experience in itself,” says Nick. “We took two planes, drove for five hours, then jumped on a boat for 45 minutes to reach the ‘Estancia’, or the farm. From there, we visited the trees on horseback through the jungle. It was one of the coolest things I’d ever seen in my life.”

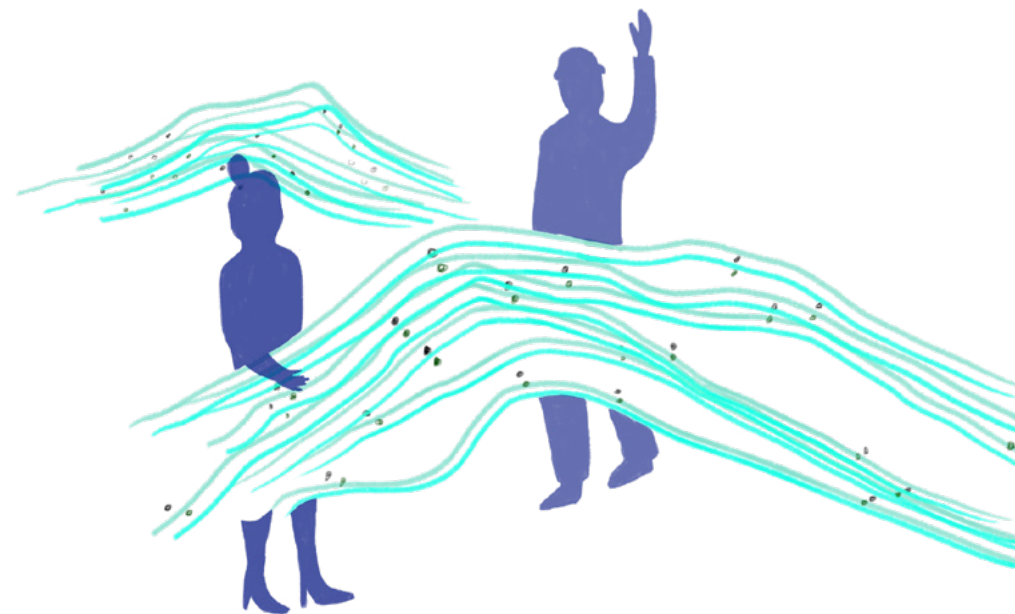
The farm is located on the border between Brazil and Paraguay,

alongside the Paraguay River, and is dedicated to reforestation. The Pongamia tree is quite unique in that the nut it produces can be pressed to extract crude oil and help produce green, renewable fuel.

There and then, Nick knew just how much potential this tree could hold not only as a business but for the environment, too. He knew he wanted to start his own company based on what he had seen at the farm. Fifteen minutes later, sitting in the shade of a tree, he already developed the idea for Corekees.

### **The business proposition: Profiting from a greener world**

Simply put, the concept behind Corekees is that it is possible to invest in sustainability and get a financial return on it. The company targets the consumer market with the proposition that people can offset (part of) their carbon footprint by planting a Pongamia tree.



“The proposition is to profit from a greener world,” Nick says. “Nowadays, sustainability is mostly based on charity and at one point you run into a glass ceiling, which will never make a real impact. We want to connect an economic value to making

**“When you buy a tree, it’s yours for 20 years,” Nick says.**

yourself climate neutral and being aware of your carbon footprint.”

In other words, if you plant a tree with Corekees, you invest in the environment.

The way it works is rather straightforward: Individuals from around the world, but currently mostly Europe, can easily calculate their carbon footprint per year and decide how much of it they want to compensate by paying for Pongamia trees to be planted in Paraguay. Corekees facilitates the entire process from handling the orders to making sure that the trees are planted with their partner in South America.

“When you buy a tree, it’s yours for 20 years”, Nick says. “The first harvest comes in three to four years, at which point the first nuts come off the trees, they get crushed for the crude oil and sold to major oil com-

panies to be refined and turned into green fuel. The money that comes back to us, we divide proportionally among our tree buyers.”

People who do invest through Corekees can expect a stable return on investment (ROI) from the seventh year onwards, with an average of 7.8% over the 20 years.

### **A business with sustainability at its heart**

To build a company that essentially sells sustainability, it was key for Nick and his team to create a business model that is sustainable as well. And not just financially sustainable, but also with regard to the environment.

First and foremost, the land that they can use to plant the trees must have been deforested at least 10 years ago in order to meet the requirements of major oil companies for green fuel production. Also, it should not be suitable for food production, because “growing food al-



**Nick van Heeswijk**  
- Corekees

ways comes before any commercial business activity,” Nick says.

“We use land from cattle farms,” he continues. “We go to farmers and ask if we could lease their land. For

**“Everyone wants to be the second investor, but not the first.”**

the first year, the cows would need to graze on a different land but after that, they can walk among the trees. The farmers thus make money from

the land that they would need to reforest one day anyway.”

Once the trees have been harvested and the nuts crushed for oil, the residue of crushing is used as protein for cattle feed and the shell is used as either biomass or an organic fertilizer. In other words, the process from planting to harvesting the Pongamia trees and beyond is an entirely circular one.

Corekees and their partners in South America also make sure that their local workforce receive above-minimum wages and that they are

provided with the transportation to and from the farm, and even accommodation if necessary.

While it all sounds like a win-win-win, there have been challenges along the way, too. “Our main difficulty has been convincing people,” Nick says. “Everyone wants to be the second investor, but not the first.”

This is often what happens with business cases that are new and not yet proven on the market. Corekees has already planted over 13,000 Pongamia trees since the summer of 2018 and they are soon expecting their first harvest. “This will be our proof of concept,” Nick says. It takes years to get there, but Nick has all the patience in the world.

After all, his business idea can make becoming climate-neutral that much easier.

**More info: [corekees.com](https://www.corekees.com)**

## Deriving value from Borneo's rainforest

More than half of the rainforest in Borneo has disappeared over the past 50 years. With it, so have various plant and animal species, and the access of local communities to clean drinking water and fertile soils. Every effort to preserve the rainforest and leverage its natural resources has, therefore, been more than necessary.

Forestwise, founded by Dirk-Jan Oudshoorn and Theo Smits, is one of the companies taking a stand against this decades-long deforestation. Monoculture plantations – palm oil plantations in particular – are among the key dangers to rainforests, affecting both the environment and the people who live there.

“Our goal is to create value out of the rainforest and to empower the local population to earn money from it, so they can continue living in their communities,” says Commercial Director Arjan Verschoor. “We want to let companies and consumers know that there is a lot of value to be derived from rainforests, and that it can be done in an efficient and sustainable way.”

### **The ambition: Preserving the 44% of rainforest left in Borneo**

Looking for an environmentally- and financially sustainable way to preserve what is left of the rainforest on the Southeast Asian island is an ambitious goal. Without a doubt so. It requires a solid business case that allows to make a profit from the natural resources of the rainforest in a sustainable and fair way, while also engaging the local population.

Forestwise believes to have one. What the company aims to achieve is create skincare, cosmetics and food products by using the natural resources of the rainforest, without causing any harm to it. Essentially, the team decided to look for ways to produce oils by extracting fat from special nuts.

“We have the illipe butter, which is one of our products with unique moisturizing properties, and it is the fat that comes out of the illipe nuts,” says Arjan. “The way we work with the locals is they wait for the nuts to fall down from the trees, source them and dry them. We then buy the nuts from them, press them in production machines and the fat that comes out is left to solidify. Eventually, it is used to create new products.”

***“It is important to understand the true price of palm oil products,” Arjan says.***

After securing a first round of funding a year ago and officially launch-





ing the company, Forestwise is currently building their own production facility as well.

### **Benefitting from what the rainforest has to offer**

For Arjan and the rest of the team of Forestwise, it is not only important to create a business with a sustainable mission, but also to educate people on the value that the rainforest can bring.

The population in the rainforests of Borneo has been there for many, many years, but it wasn't until 50 years ago that things started to change. Palm oil plantations would increasingly replace the original

rainforest, harming much of the wildlife and displacing the local population.

"It is important to understand the true price of palm oil products," Arjan says. "People who live in the rainforest often don't realize the negative effects of deforestation until they don't have fresh drinking water, fertile soil, or even a place to live anymore. These are side effects that they only come to know when it's too late."

That being said, there is a need to educate local communities on what deforestation means for them and instead, how they can leverage the rainforest in a sustainable way. The



**Arjan Verschoor**  
- Forestwise

***"We try to give locals the opportunity to stay in the life they already have and the tribes they have been in for thousands of years. We are working on preserving the local culture and what the land has to offer."***

main goal of Forestwise is to show both locals and their consumers that there is an alternative way to treating nature and consuming the products that come from it.

"We try to give locals the opportunity to stay in the life they already have

and the tribes they have been in for thousands of years. We are working on preserving the local culture and what the land has to offer."

Forestwise currently has 25 local employees and is working on creating a stronger demand for their products. They have already received several orders, including from global distributor IMCD.

With deals secured, the young company is looking to connect the local market to the global cosmetics industry. There is still a long way to go, Arjan says, but they are already making strides towards putting their sustainable products on the market.

**More info: [forestwise.earth](https://forestwise.earth)**

## Connecting the dots from idea to impact

Noorderwind is not your typical venture generator. It is not a design agency and it is not a consultancy either. It is a collective with not just one single owner, but a team of “captains” and “crew members” who put societal and environmental impact before money-making.

“We take sustainable ideas and we co-create, co-validate and co-implement them,” says Boukje Vastbinder, one of the two founders of Noorderwind. “We are a bit different from a design agency as we not only help come up with the ideas, but also validate and implement them. We are also different from a consultancy because we don’t consult, but actually do the work.”

In other words, Noorderwind turns sustainable ideas into impactful businesses and does so in co-creation with various parties and stakeholders, from startups to corporates and the government.

### Running a sustainable company as a collective

Everything about Noorderwind is a bit different. For one, the organization is structured as a collective, which means that nobody really owns it.

“Being part of a company that is of everybody can be a challenge because you need one or more people to set the direction and make sure we stay the course,” Boukje says. “That’s why we have captains and crew. The captains are responsible for having everyone onboard and reaching their goals, while the crew put their time, expertise and capacity into various projects.”

Every year, crew members are asked if they want to become captains, and vice versa. Noorderwind has been around for three years and currently consists of a team of 20, four captains in charge of the strategy

and goal-setting, and 16 freelance crew members.

Each of them is an expert in their own field, from medical technology and circular design to change management and personal leadership. Whenever Noorderwind takes on a new project, they make sure that they have the capacity within their talent pool to support it. Projects always take place in co-creation, in which they work closely together with the idea owner.

“The way we work is based on an exchange of knowledge and hours among the different teams, startups and organizations,” Boukje says. “We, as Noorderwind, are the broker of those hours. So if one company or person is good in IP and patents, it might share its knowledge with a company that has legal expertise, which in turn might help a third with their contracts. A corporate or a governmental institution can do

***“The way we work is based on an exchange of knowledge and hours among the different teams, startups and organizations,”***



**Noorderwind team**



the same.” In case an organization is not interested in exchanging hours, they get paid for providing their expertise.

### **Co-creating solutions with impact**

The team of Noorderwind stands by the idea that societal and environmental impact is more important than “making big money fast”, as Boukje puts it, as long as the businesses they work with can financially sustain themselves. At the moment, the organization is working on 18 projects from developing innovative medical technologies to collaborating with the Dutch Army on delivering first aid packages.

Their approach to various projects differs based on what is needed, whether it is a one-time project to encourage immediate action or a complete overhaul of a company’s strategy to become more sustainable in the long run.

“For the Dutch Army, we’ve organized design sprints, the last one of which was focused on disaster areas and finding out if it was possible to use drones to deploy first aid and food packages,” Boukje explains. “As the Army does not have the internal capacity to run such a project, we put together a team - with experts from their side and sourced from our own network. In this specific

**“For the Dutch Army, we’ve organized design sprints, the last one of which was focused on disaster areas and finding out if it was possible to use drones to deploy first aid and food packages,”**

example, we asked a drone expert as well as a person who’s worked in development aid to spend a week with the team to help drive this project forward.”

And so they did.

This is how Noorderwind makes projects happen: They match the right (entrepreneurial) talent to the right business idea in order to create the necessary impact – both societal and environmental. They have the patience to see things through. They are not in it for the quick financial wins but for making the world better in the long run.

**More info: [noorderwind.co](https://noorderwind.co)**



**Boukje Vastbinder  
- Noorderwind**

RABOBANK:

## Making sustainability a part of businesses' DNA

Rabobank has always had collaboration at its heart. Having started out as a cooperative bank more than 120 years ago, it has long had a tradition of working for its clients and together with them.

The same applies to its sustainability mission, too. "At Rabobank, we believe that we should be more than just a normal bank," says Serat Gedik, Product Owner Sustainable Business Development. "We have a sustainability mission and we work daily on solutions that create positive impact."

The mission they go by is rather straightforward: Growing a better world together. It is not just about making the world more sustainable, but also about doing it collaboratively. "We cannot do it alone, so we look

for ways to translate our sustainability goals to our clients and work on them together," Serat adds.

### Keyword: Transition

Önder Ulucan is Relationship Manager Corporate Clients at Rabobank

*"I talk to clients every day and if there is one key word that keeps coming up it is transition,"*

and he knows exactly what it is that those clients are going through, working on and looking for.

"I talk to clients every day and if there is one key word that keeps coming



Önder Ulucan  
- Rabobank

up, it is transition," he says. "In a lot of sectors, there is a need for transition to sustainability."

At Rabobank, too, Serat, Önder and the rest of their teams have been making steps towards becoming more sustainable as an organization as well as helping others in their own transition. Looking back, five years ago sustainability was not on top-of-mind for employees at Rabobank.

"We first needed to educate our own employees on the value of sustainability," Önder says.

"We needed to bring them the right knowledge and skills so they can then pass them on to our clients."

Today, things look a lot different. Sustainability has become part of Rabobank's DNA and is a lot more

than just a buzzword that has to be pushed down by management. Teams have adopted sustainability as part of all the work they do and not just as a nice-to-have. "There has been a sense of urgency for us to become more sustainable as individuals, a company and a society, and our employees have embraced it."

As a result, Rabobank has been able to increasingly support clients in making their own transition to sustainability.





**Driving sustainability with knowledge, financing and a strong network**

Rabobank works together with its clients in ways that drive sustainable solutions forward. "One example is our Circular Economy Desk," Serat says. "We've created a team dedicated to providing the most relevant knowledge on the circular economy so we can work alongside our clients' challenges."



The team of Rabobank makes sure that they sit down with their SME and corporate clients and talk about the goals they each have with regard to sustainability. That way, they can all work together towards common goals and Rabobank can use their knowledge, network and financing capabilities to support clients when needed.

A recent example is the bank's col-

***"We need to make sure that we keep having the right discussions with our clients,"***

laboration with an agricultural business in the US. "There are many farms looking to go organic nowadays but it takes up to three years



and it is hard to do without facing financial problems," Önder says. "Our client is one of them and we make sure that in the coming years, they do not face any financial difficulties.

As a bank, Rabobank has a big client base - in agriculture, too - so they made it possible that in three years' time, the farmer would have a launching customer for his organic produce. That way, the customer has their supply ensured, while the farmer can make the transition on a financially sound basis.

With the right knowledge and by leveraging their network, Rabobank enables their clients to the next step in their business without much risk or difficulty.

"We need to make sure that we keep having the right discussions with our

clients," both Serat and Önder agree. "We have established a good base level for sustainability and now is the time to make it part of our and our clients' DNA."



## Paving the way for green technologies to thrive

“We are engineers and we love challenging projects that require us to design and implement smart solutions,” says Petra Beris. So much so, in fact, that she wanted to do it on a large scale, creating as much impact as possible. Together with colleague Stef Clevers, she co-founded TransitionHERO, a Rotterdam-based organization that enables companies – startups and corporates alike – to make green technologies part of their business model.

Petra and Stef both come from a corporate background, having worked for a large engineering firm for more than a decade. Part of their job was to find ways to create new sustainable businesses as well as support startups in developing green technologies and scaling them up.

“We found out that it was quite a challenge to do it in such a [corporate] environment and that we needed more freedom and entre-

preneurship,” Petra says. So they decided to start their own business together and laid the foundation of TransitionHERO.

“We don’t want to do small, simple projects;” she continues, “we want to do things that really matter and what really matters at the moment is climate change. We believe we need to go into a circular economy and we need to put more effort into realizing that.”

### Helping businesses scale up green technologies

The mission of TransitionHERO is to enable companies to design and scale up new technologies with a strong focus on sustainability and positive environmental impact. They are looking at a wide range of green technologies, from energy solutions and circular production systems, to recycling technologies and bio-based chemistry.

Typical for startups developing such technologies is that they are full of enthusiasm and ambition, but that they often lack the knowledge of bringing their idea to an industrial scale plant. “They are a bit like penguins,” Petra says. “They walk around a bit uneasily, but everybody loves them and wants to have a look at them. Still, they barely move forward because they are often in the wrong environment. The thing with penguins is, if you put them in water, they’ll start swimming.”

It is the same with green technologies, she adds, “if you put them in the right environment and build the right business case around it, it will work out.”

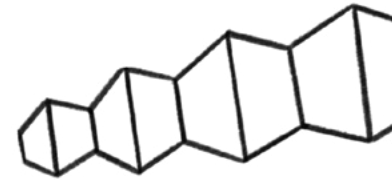
This is essentially what TransitionHERO aims to do for startups and more established companies. The team makes sure to create the right environment, with the right resources, skills and expertise so new sus-

tainable ideas can thrive. They help them build the right business case and support in engineering towards an industrial scale, in order to grow even the most ambitious of their projects.

In addition to setting the stage for new and innovative business ideas, TransitionHERO also makes it easier to bridge the gap between startups and corporates by helping the first build industry-ready demos of their technologies. They also facilitate the collaboration between startups and corporates, as those can often be quite the challenge. Eventually, TransitionHERO is also able to provide companies with a much faster and effective scale-up of their technologies, in which a lot of repetitive work is automated.

### Putting the TransitionHERO approach to work

One of the projects that the com-



pany is currently working on is for a client in Norway looking to build a greentech demo plant on site of a power plant. "It is a project that makes you think and work on so many levels," Petra says. "Our client has developed a technology that uses biomass to produce bio coal. There are multiple processes involved, from heat integration and use, to replacing chemical building blocks in the industry with bio-based building blocks."

Petra and her team believe the latter is the future, which is what makes such projects so exciting for them. This specific one is a Horizon 2020 project from the EU, with a duration of four years and TransitionHERO is onboard as the technical lead for it. The end goal is to build a demonstration plant for the technology.

Even though Petra and Stef's company has been around for less than a year now, they have made strides in growing it in terms of team, funding and projects that they are working on. Getting a first investor onboard was a key step in their development as it allowed them to build a solid business case and get started. They have also hired their first employees,

all of whom engineers, which Petra says was one of their key achievements, but also the main challenges.

"Finding the right people was indeed our biggest challenge to date, because we look for a very specific combination of the right capabilities and the right mindset - creative, open-minded and passionate for technology." With some of those people now onboard, the sky is the limit.

If you ask Petra what she's really looking forward to, it would be scaling bigger and better green technologies in a faster, smarter and more effective way than ever before. She and her team are committed to doing just that and they cannot wait to make it happen.

**More info: [transitionhero.nl](https://transitionhero.nl)**



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