



**OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE
CHAIRPERSON**

**KGALEMA MOTHLANTE FOUNDATION
DRAKENSBURG INCLUSIVE GROWTH FORUM**



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KGALEMA MOTHLANTE FOUNDATION DRAKENSBURG INCLUSIVE GROWTH FORUM

**SPEAKING NOTES BY THE EXECUTIVE CHAIRPERSON OF THE NYDA DR. SUNSHINE MYENDE ON
OCCASION KGALEMA MOTHLANTE FOUNDATION DRAKENSBURG INCLUSIVE GROWTH
FORUM**

12 October 2025

*Programme Director,
Former President Kgalema Motlanthe and the Foundation,
Your Excellencies —
H.E. Ambassador Al-Akbari,
H.E. High Commissioner Mantaha,
H.E. Ambassador Fonseca Filho,
Ms. Nomsa Chabeli,
Distinguished guests, colleagues, all protocol observed*

Thank you, Programme Director.

Allow me to express my gratitude to the Kgalema Motlanthe Foundation for convening this vital conversation and also to my esteemed fellow panellists, whose countries and institutions offer us lessons in resilience, innovation, and inclusion.

As we gather here in the Drakensberg, we are reminded that growth, real inclusive growth, is not only an economic challenge. It is also a moral and sociological question about who belongs in our collective future, and who is being left behind.

Youth Unemployment as a Social Fact

In South Africa, 46.1% of young people between 15 and 34 years old are unemployed.

But unemployment is not simply an economic condition; it is, as sociologists would call it, a social fact, that is it reveals how deeply structural inequalities shape the life chances of young people.

For scores of our young people, unemployment does not only mean a lack of income, it also represents a collapse of confidence, delayed adulthood, disrupted dreams and mental illness (depression).

Unemployment results in poverty which results in the deprivation of capability, and without capability one is denied the freedom to lead the life one values.

So, when we speak of youth unemployment, we are really speaking about capability deprivation, that is the stunting of human potential in a country that depends on that potential for its future.

The NYDA's Mandate and Framework

The National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) was established precisely to address that challenge.

However, should not be seen as a single implementing body, but rather as part of the ecosystem of development — a catalyst that connects policy, coordination, and participation.

Our work is grounded in three pillars:

- Economic Empowerment – enabling young people to create and sustain livelihoods.
- Skills and Education-to-Work Pathways – ensuring that learning leads to earning.
- Civic and Social Agency – strengthening young people's role in shaping democracy and development.

Every organ of state is mandated to contribute to youth development. Our role as the NYDA is to ensure coherence, coordination, and accountability across this ecosystem.

A National Crisis of Transition

The National Development Plan 2030 (NDP 2030) envisioned a skilled, employed, and capable youth population. Yet, by 2024, that vision remains largely unrealised.

Youth unemployment is now a national crisis. And what makes it particularly complex is that it is not just about the creation of jobs, but about the transition into jobs.

The transition from learning to earning has become one of our greatest blockages. Too many young people remain trapped between qualification and opportunity.

The Presidential Youth Employment Intervention (PYEI), which the NYDA helps coordinate, was established precisely to bridge that gap — by improving pathways into work and promoting work experience as a key enabler of employability.

For instance, the Teacher Assistant Programme under the Presidency and the

Department of Basic Education has given thousands of young people both income and confidence — proof that targeted public employment can be transformative when properly designed.

Even the Employment Tax Incentive, despite some shortcomings, has supported the creation of more than 680,000 (six hundred and eighty thousand) youth jobs, particularly among those aged 18–29.

These are not silver bullets, but they remind us that coordinated, **evidence-based policy works** when aligned with the lived realities of young people.

Reimagining the System – Collaboration as a Development Logic

The NYDA's approach is increasingly grounded in what I call collaborative capability, the idea that youth development cannot be achieved by one actor or one policy domain alone.

For instance we currently have formal partnerships with 16 of the 21 Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), building bridges between education, training, and employability. And are now focused on strengthening coordination with national and provincial departments, and aligning with the District Development Model to localise youth programmes to align our programmes with local needs because we cannot assume communities are homogeneous.

And perhaps most importantly, we are rebuilding our partnerships with the private sector and civil society, ensuring that youth empowerment is mainstreamed into business and social investment strategies.

Fanon warned us, *“Every generation must discover its mission, fulfil it, or betray it.”*

Our generation's mission is to rebuild trust between the state and its youth, between learning and opportunity, between participation and progress.

Beyond Economics

From a sociological perspective, **unemployment also threatens social cohesion.**

It fractures identity, weakens belonging, and erodes faith in institutions.

Émile Durkheim described this condition as anomie that is the breakdown of social norms when individuals no longer see a pathway between effort and reward.

That is what youth unemployment represents today, not just economic exclusion, but social disconnection.

That is why the NYDA's strategy extends beyond jobs. We are building social capital and connecting young people to networks, mentors, and peers who can open pathways and restore belonging.

Innovation and the Future of Work

We also recognise that the world of work is changing rapidly.

Digitalisation, automation, and the green transition are redefining the economy.

If we do not equip our youth with future-oriented skills, in AI, coding, renewable energy, and entrepreneurship we risk creating a generation that is educated but unemployable.

Our collaboration with the Department of Higher Education and Training and various SETAs is aimed precisely at this, at integrating digital transformation into all youth services and preparing our workforce for the demands of the 21st century.

Our task is to restore the dignity of labour and the joy of productivity for a generation that has too often been defined by waiting, rather than working.

The Path Forward

As we look ahead, several priorities stand out:

- We must co-create youth development interventions with young people, not for them.
- We must mobilise resources — funding, data, and technical capacity — for youth inclusion.
- We must strengthen linkages beyond government, especially with business and academia.
- We must embed youth development in every government plan and budget — from municipalities to ministries.
- And we must market and communicate youth services effectively so that every young person knows where to go for help.

Collaboration must become the organising principle of youth development.

When organisations share knowledge, resources, and trust, they multiply innovation, efficiency, and impact.

Closing

In conclusion, youth unemployment is not just an economic challenge — it is a test of our collective imagination.

The NYDA is committed to being the catalyst and convener that turns potential into participation, and participation into productivity. Because inclusive growth is impossible without youth inclusion.

One of the key tenants of democracy is participation or we wouldn't be able to sustain it when citizens are passive observers.

That is precisely the spirit of the NYDA, ours is to move young people from the sidelines of development to the centre of South Africa's future.

If we invest wisely in our youth, in their skills, in their confidence, and in their power to create, we will not only solve unemployment; we will unlock the full promise of our democracy.

Thank you.