



KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY THE EXECUTIVE CHAIRPERSON OF THE NATIONAL YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AGENCY (NYDA) ON THE OCCASION OF NATIONAL YOUTH SERVICE (NYS) LEARNING FORUM

21 October 2025

Programme Director,

CEO of the NYDA, Mr. Ndumiso Kubheka

Executive Deputy Chairperson of the NYDA, Mr. Bonga Makhanya

Executive Management of the NYDA,

Esteemed Guests,

Stakeholders from Government and Civil Society,

Representatives of our youth-led NPOs,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me begin by saying that it is both a privilege and an honour to address this important gathering. Today's forum represents more than a meeting of minds — it is a space where our NPOs within the Incubator Programme can engage meaningfully in shaping the future of youth development. It is here that reflection meets renewal, where learning transforms into leadership, and where the aspirations of South Africa's young people are translated into tangible action through community service and social innovation.

As we meet here today, South Africa continues to grapple with a youth unemployment rate that remains one of the highest in the world. Nearly 6 out of 10 young people are without work.

What we must always remember is that behind these numbers are real human stories, stories of young graduates in townships searching for opportunity, of rural youth who never get a chance to acquire the skills needed to compete in the modern economy, and of young women whose potential is undermined by social and economic barriers.



CEO, unemployment is not merely a statistic, it is a crisis of dignity, of social cohesion, and of hope. Unemployment is a social blight that threatens the very fabric of our democracy, and we must agree to unite and fight it with every fibre of our being.

It is for this reason that the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 calls on all of us; as government, business, civil society, and communities to “*build a capable, developmental state that enables all citizens to achieve their potential.*” The NDP envisions a South Africa where young people are active participants in economic life, not bystanders.

As the NYDA, through the NYS Programme, we are answering that call, by empowering young people not just to find work, but to create it; not only to be beneficiaries of development, but agents of transformation.

I'm certain, colleagues agree with me when I state that the NYS Incubator Programme represents one of the most powerful tools, we have to address these social ills. It recognises that development is not sustainable unless it is locally driven by young people, for their communities.

This programme is not simply about compliance training or capacity building. It is about nurturing a new generation of social innovators, that is young people who are leaders that can mobilise, organise, and sustain development initiatives in their communities.

Over the past three years, the NYS Incubator has built a vibrant network of more than 1,500 contactable and ready to serve youth-led NPOs across all nine provinces, creating an ecosystem of service and entrepreneurship that reaches into rural villages, informal settlements, and township communities.

Through our partnerships with our stakeholders, we have demonstrated that when partnerships are purpose driven, transformation is possible.

These partnerships have helped young people access training, mentorship, funding, and digital tools that are critical for their sustainability. And we believe this is how we begin to bridge the gap between the potential of our youth and the opportunities of our economy.



This Forum is one of many events that stand as a testament to what is possible when we place young people at the centre of our national development agenda not as passive beneficiaries, but as active agents of change and architects of their own future.

As the NYDA, we remain steadfast in our commitment to up scale the NYS Programme into a national movement that reaches every corner of this country. The next phase of our journey calls for bold action — expanding the NYS Incubator Programme to ensure that more youth-led NPOs receive the training, mentorship, and tools necessary to thrive.

We are intensifying our investment in capacity building and training, enabling organisations to move from survival to sustainability. This expansion will be underpinned by additional resources, dedicated to strengthening institutional capacity, financial management, compliance, and leadership skills.

We envision a future where every province has a network of capable, compliant, and community-driven youth organisations that can deliver transformative services aligned with the national development priorities.

Most important, for this initiative to thrive and have meaningful impact we must also institutionalise a continuous Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, ensuring that the impact of every intervention is measured, documented, and improved upon. Our goal colleagues must not be limited to running programmes but our goal must be to change lives.

In this new phase, we will also integrate a peer mentorship model, where revitalised NYS implementing partners will coach and guide grassroots NPOs. This mentorship will be written into their Service Level Agreements, ensuring that capacity building becomes a shared responsibility.

Our long-term vision is clear and that is to graduate youth-led NPOs into fully-fledged implementing partners of the revitalised NYS. That is how we create a pipeline of excellence, accountability, and sustainability within the sector.

We have also recognised that for the NPO sector to thrive, we must bridge the gap between practice and knowledge. That is why the NYDA has begun engaging with Wits University and



the National School of Government (NSG) to establish accredited training for NPOs as part of our capacity-building strategy.

This partnership will ensure that our young leaders receive not just skills, but recognised qualifications that open doors for further learning and career progression.

This alignment between academia, government, and civil society is how we professionalise social development work and ensure that the youth sector is treated with the same seriousness as any other pillar of the economy.

When we study global examples from countries such as Finland, Japan, and others a clear lesson emerges: a thriving Non-Profit Organisation (NPO) sector is not incidental—it is the product of strong legal frameworks, predictable regulation, and deep collaboration between the state, private sector, and citizens. These countries demonstrate how clear compliance systems and a culture of giving can sustain millions of community initiatives; furthermore, they show us the value of investing in civic infrastructure and trust; and Japan's consistency on the *Doing Good Index* reflects the power of a stable regulatory environment that encourages innovation and social investment. For South Africa, the lesson is clear: building a sustainable NPO ecosystem is not only about charity but rather it is about nation-building. A capable, well-supported civil society sector can become the backbone of youth development, job creation, and social cohesion, ensuring that the NYS becomes a movement of enduring impact rather than a moment in policy history.

Colleagues, the growth and development of our country is not the responsibility of government alone. Every state entity, every business, every community structure, and every South African must recognise that youth development is a collective national duty. The private sector must open its doors, not only for internships and learnerships, but for meaningful partnerships that build capacity and unlock access to markets.

Government departments must coordinate their youth strategies, align with the Medium-Term Strategic Framework (MTSF), and ensure that youth development is mainstreamed into every policy and budget.



And civil society, the heartbeat of our democracy, must continue to hold us accountable, to partner with us, and to ensure that development reaches even the most remote corners of our nation.

As the NYDA, we are ready to play our part to convene, to collaborate, and to catalyse. But we call on all stakeholders gathered here today to join hands and make youth service not an event, but a national culture.

To the young people here today, remember, this is your moment. The future is not something that will happen to you; it is something that must happen through you.

Furthermore, we must remember that the National Development Plan envisions young people who *“have access to education and training, work, and self-employment opportunities that enable them to improve their lives and contribute to the economy.”* But that vision does not rest on government alone and in reality can only become reality if you take ownership of your role through initiatives such as these and as agents of change.

Whether you are in a township in Soweto, a village in the Eastern Cape, or a rural community in Limpopo your ideas, your energy, and your service matter. The NYS Incubator Programme is your platform. Use it to learn, to grow, to build, and to serve.

The story of our country’s renewal will not be written in boardrooms alone. It will be written in the classrooms, community halls, and dusty streets where young people rise every day to make a difference.

As we look to the future, the NYDA reaffirms its commitment to a South Africa where no young person is left behind and where every youth-led organisation is supported to succeed, and where service becomes the foundation of leadership.

Together, we can build a South Africa that works for its youth and through its youth, works for all.

Thank you.

