



**SPEAKING NOTES BY THE EXECUTIVE CHAIRPERSON OF THE NYDA, DR. SUNSHINE MYENDE,
ON THE OCCASION OF IEC NATIONAL EVENT ON WOMEN CHAMPIONING DEMOCRACY:
PAVING THE WAY FOR 2026 LOCAL ELECTIONS**

27 August 2025

Key words on the invite: Access, Empowerment, and Inclusivity

MESSAGING: Our main message in this Panel and Interview is that we want more young women Mayors and we are calling on gender activists and women organisations in the political space to start these discussions. Representation is not enough; we need quotas that are deliberate and speak to the executive of councils as well.

NOTES:

INTRODUCTION:

Indeed, it is true that the role and participation of women in South Africa has evolved immensely post 1994, and we must thank the women that came before us for this, because of them we witnessed women take their place in many spaces they were not represented in.

However, representation is not enough. Just as an example I, think you'd agree there are certain elements that we've seen last beyond the years of apartheid and oppression. A typical example is migrant labour it still exists. And its these elements that have lasted beyond the years of apartheid that make one realise that we need more deliberate and intentional policies that are responsive to our conditions.

So, in this instance representation is not enough because our societies are inherently patriarchal, we have been socialised in ways of doing and being that are rooted in patriarchal norms. So, we need much than representation to ensure that we see young women participate and are elected in key strategic areas at municipal level.

WHY DO WE THINK YOUNG WOMEN ARE NOT PARTICIPATING?

The participation of women, particularly young women, is a key indicator of inclusivity and representation in our political systems.

Although, young women have become visible in activism and political spaces but their visibility in the formal structures of political remain significantly low, their representation in the National Assembly is significantly low. The inclusivity of young women in formal structures of electoral processes is not only important for representation but it is critical for policy

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influence and shaping policy to adequately address their issues ranging from unemployment, gender-based violence, exclusion from certain industries, reproductive health and many other issues forming part and parcel of their intersectionality.

The voter' turnout for young people, particularly young women, continues to be a cause for concern. The low voter turnouts have been attributed to socio-economic factors and disengagement in political spaces. I think what we also lack in understanding as people in general that democracy comes with the huge responsibility of participation. Democracy, I think, for many people has created an illusion that we must not participate but our votes could determine whether our countries a stable or not and that impacts a myriad of other areas like social life and the economy.

Women are underrepresented in most leadership and political structural positions. For instance, stats reveal that women make-up 40.9% of municipal councillors and yet only a small percentage of occupants of mayoral positions are women compared to men who occupy 68% of those leadership roles. WE WANT TO SEE MORE YOUNG WOMEN MAYORS, this is a conversation that gender activists or women organisations within the political space that needs to be brought up. Women must begin to demand quotas not only at the entire council but in the executive, we must specify this because it is one of the ways we begin to socialise differently when we see and begin to normalise seeing women in such spaces.

WHAT HAS BEEN THE IMPACT OF YOUNG WOMEN IN POLITICAL SPACES

The overall representation of women in the National Assembly has improved overtime. In 2024, women held 42,8% seats in parliament and hold 44,4% of seats in the National Council of Provinces. Despite these improvements, young women continue to be underrepresented in electoral processes and in their occupancy within the National Assembly.

As of the 7th Parliament, which commenced June 2025, 33 members of Parliament are aged between 18-34, these members makeup the youth body in Parliament. Of the 33, 16 members are young women (ParliMeter, 2025). The numbers mentioned above reveal that young women only make-up 4% of all MPs in the National Assembly.

Although young women are underrepresented within the National Assembly their roles have been representative and substantive policy influence and engagement. Young women have played multiple crucial roles;

- Policy and advocacy: young MPs have been vocal in the issues of gender-based violence, the call for resolutions targeting youth unemployment and education, and reproductive health and rights.
- Young women that are MPs have led debates highlighting young people's issues like student debt, inequality, the need for young people in senior positions and other

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socio-economic challenges faced by young women like heading households whilst unemployed.

- Young women as MP have taken the stance and advocacy against patriarchal norms. Young MPs have prompted conversations on the importance of young women being represented in leadership, oversight roles and legislative roles.
- Young women that are and have been MPs have fostered the conversations and paved way for the educational norms on issues of mental health, issues of abuse, the modernity issues of activism amongst young people and have pushed for these factors to influence formal policymaking within the processes of the democratic state of South Africa.

The role that young women have played in parliament in driving such progressive policy and legislative changes underscores the crucial need for young women to be recognised and to participate.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO ENSURE BETTER REPRESENTATION OF YOUNG WOMEN?

We need more deliberate gender quotas at Local Government Level

Women and all progressives must advocate for legislation or internal party policies that set quotas for young women candidates, specifically in mayoral and executive roles, not just councillor positions.

This is crucial because representation improves when systems require it — and quotas have been effective in other parts of the world.

We can also consider creating a **Young Women Voter Mobilisation Campaign**, focusing on townships, rural areas, and universities.

This is also another crucial aspect because low turnout among young women reinforces their political disconnection. Mobilising them builds both political pressure and future candidates.

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