



CLOSING REMARKS BY THE EXECUTIVE CHAIRPERSON OF THE NATIONAL YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AGENCY (NYDA) ON THE OCCASION OF THE NATIONAL YOUTH INVESTMENT INDABA

31 October 2025

Programme Director,

Honourable Deputy President of the Republic of South Africa,

Members of the Executive,

distinguished guests,

Leaders of industry,

development finance institutions,

All young people present today,

As we bring this historic Youth Investment Indaba to a close, I am reminded of the words of Amílcar Cabral, who said, “*Tell no lies, claim no easy victories.*”

Today, we can safely say we have told no lies about the state of youth unemployment, and we do not claim easy victories. But what we have achieved is far greater: we have begun to think together, act together, and imagine together the kind of society we want to build.

Colleagues, the Youth Investment Indaba was not conceived as another event on the calendar; it was designed as a national reckoning, as an opportunity to interrogate, with honesty and intellectual rigour, the structural constraints that continue to exclude young South Africans from the mainstream economy.

The NYDA's posture, under this new leadership, is that youth development is not a social add on to economic policy, rather it is the very foundation of sustainable growth and transformation.



If South Africa's economy is to regenerate, it must do so through the productive inclusion of its youth. The real question before us is not whether we can afford to invest in young people, but whether we can afford not to.

Over the course of today, we have critically examined four intersecting challenges; the mismatch between capital and opportunity, the disconnect between education and the labour market, the policy bottlenecks that frustrate innovation and the geographic inequalities that leave rural youth behind.

What has come out of that is a collective response has been bold and transformative; to establish a National Youth Fund that will serve as a catalytic vehicle for youth investment, to align skills ecosystems with strategic sectors of the economy, and to advocate for Youth Priority Economic Zones; spaces that incentivise job-rich investment, youth inclusive industrialisation and economic opportunities for the youth in townships and rural communities.

This Indaba has therefore moved us from policy abstraction to institutional architecture and from discourse to design.

As the NYDA, we recognise that credibility is earned through ethical governance and consistent delivery. Colleagues can rest assured, we are rebuilding the institution on the principles of transparency, accountability, and intellectual honesty.

We are committed to ensuring that every grant issued, every training programme implemented, and every partnership signed contributes to a broader developmental logic, one that sees young people not as beneficiaries, but as builders of the economy.

Good governance, after all, is not a compliance exercise; it is a moral responsibility to those whose futures depend on our decisions.

In reflecting on the lessons of economic history, I am drawn to the work of Ha-Joon Chang, who reminds us that the greatest economies in the world are powerful precisely because of government intervention.



He cautions us that leaving markets entirely to their own devices does not produce fairness, inclusion, or development. Markets are not self-creating; they are social institutions that require strategic state direction, coordination, and vision.

As the NYDA and as government, our task is therefore not to retreat from the market, but to re-shape it and to make it work for young people, for equity, and for long-term national competitiveness.

This is the development logic underpinning our call for a National Youth Fund, it is a deliberate act of public coordination to correct market failure and to open pathways for youth economic agency.

Colleagues, we also stand at a critical inflection point where the digital economy, artificial intelligence, and automation are rewriting the terms of labour and production.

However, we believe our task is not simply to prepare young people to adapt, but to equip them to lead as coders, innovators, designers, ethicists, and policy architects of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

But this must be done without losing the human essence of development. Technology must not alienate; it must empower.

As an academic, I am convinced that the new struggle for freedom in our century is the struggle for knowledge justice, that is, ensuring that every young South African has access to the intellectual and digital tools needed to participate meaningfully in the economy of the future.

We also affirm that transformation must be spatially just. Since assuming office, we have worked tirelessly to ensure the NYDA is expanding its footprint to enable visibility and accessibility in every province, district, and municipality.

As I get ready to sit, I want to state that this Indaba has reminded us that economic questions are ultimately moral questions. They ask of us: **What kind of society do we wish to become?**

Do we want a society that treats youth as passive recipients of goodwill, or one that regards them as the intellectual and productive centre of national renewal? The future we desire will



not emerge by default; it must be consciously designed through courage, coordination, and conviction.

As we conclude, let us remember that the Youth Investment Indaba is not an event, it is a moment of rupture, a deliberate interruption in the complacency of development discourse.

It signals our collective refusal to normalise youth unemployment, to accept inequality as structural inevitability, or to let markets alone determine who thrives and who is left behind.

In the words of Frantz Fanon, *“Each generation must, out of relative obscurity, discover its mission, fulfil it, or betray it.”*

Let this generation fulfil its mission, not through slogans, but through systems, not through charity, but through structural change.

The NYDA stands ready as an institution of intellect, of ethical leadership, and of action to make that transformation real.

Thank you.