



NATIONAL YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AGENCY
OUR YOUTH. OUR FUTURE.

**OFFICE OF THE
EXECUTIVE CHAIRPERSON**

**MALAWI SOUTH TO SOUTH
BENCHMARKING VISIT – NYDA HEAD OFFICE**

2 FEBRUARY 2026

SPEAKING NOTES BY THE EXECUTIVE CHAIRPERSON OF THE NYDA, DR. SUNSHINE MYENDE, ON THE OCCASION OF THE MALAWI SOUTH TO SOUTH BENCHMARKING VISIT – *Remarks on the Purpose, Context and Objectives of the Bilateral* | ±8 minutes

02 February 2026

Programme Director,
The Principal Secretary of the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture of the Republic of Malawi,
Senior Officials from the Government of Malawi,
Representatives of the National Youth Council of Malawi,
CEO, Deputy Chairperson, Management and colleagues of the NYDA,
Esteemed Guests

Good morning

It is an honour, on behalf of the National Youth Development Agency, to welcome the delegation from the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture of the Republic of Malawi to the Republic of South Africa.

We appreciate the confidence shown by the Government of Malawi in choosing to engage South Africa in this learning exchange, particularly at a time when Malawi is taking deliberate steps to institutionalise a National Youth Service Programme in response to the vulnerabilities facing its young people. This engagement reflects a shared concern about youth development and the role of the state in creating real pathways for young people to contribute, learn, and work.

Across our continent, the circumstances confronting young people are well known to all of us here. Large numbers of young people move from education into uncertainty. Many are willing to work and serve, yet struggle to access structured opportunities that allow them to build experience and livelihoods. Young women and rural youth face deeper and more persistent barriers.

At the same time Programme Director, young people continue to organise themselves, support their communities, and contribute in ways that are often informal and unrecognised. Therefore the responsibility before government is to build institutions that take this reality seriously and respond with intention and coherence.

In 2026, the African Youth Charter marks 20 years since its adoption. Over two decades, African states have committed themselves to advancing youth participation, development, and empowerment as central to the continent's future. This anniversary coincides with the ongoing review of the African Youth Charter, creating space for reflection on whether our commitments are translating into outcomes that young people can actually feel in their daily lives. It asks us to look

closely at implementation - at how policy is carried through institutions, budgets, and systems that reach young people where they are.

It is within this continental context that National Youth Service programmes have gained renewed importance across Africa. They offer a structured way for young people to contribute to their communities while gaining experience, discipline, and skills that support their transition into further opportunities. When designed with care, National Youth Service becomes a bridge between learning, service, and work. Malawi's interest in learning from existing models reflects an understanding that this work cannot be rushed and cannot be improvised. It requires institutional clarity, coordination across government, and a long-term view.

As the African proverb reminds us: *"If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."*

This engagement has been convened in that spirit - recognising that African countries learn best from one another, particularly where challenges are shaped by similar social, economic, and demographic realities.

South Africa approaches this engagement informed by its own history. This year, we commemorate 50 years since the 1976 youth uprisings, when young people asserted their agency and shaped the direction of the country through collective action and sacrifice. We also mark 30 years since the finalisation of our Constitution, which placed dignity, equality, participation, and social justice at the centre of democratic life.

These milestones continue to shape how we think about youth development. They remind us that youth participation, service, and citizenship are deeply connected, and that young people must be treated as active contributors to national development.

Over the coming days, engagements will focus on how these ideas are translated into practice. Discussions will cover institutional and policy frameworks, financing models, and coordination mechanisms. Technical sessions will explore the role of digital platforms, including SAYouth.mobi, in connecting young people to opportunities at scale. Site visits will provide space to engage directly with young people participating in National Youth Service initiatives.

For South Africa, through the National Youth Development Agency and our partners, this engagement reflects our commitment to:

- Peer learning and solidarity among African states,
- Sharing lived experience rather than prescriptive models, and
- Strengthening regional cooperation on youth development.

For Malawi, this engagement provides an opportunity to draw lessons from:

- South Africa's labour-market-oriented National Youth Service Programme, implemented within the Presidential Youth Employment Initiative, and
- Rwanda's value-driven civic service model, *Urugerero*, which places nation-building and volunteerism at its core.

Together, these experiences demonstrate that National Youth Service must be shaped by national context and priorities, rather than imposed as a uniform model.

As South Africa, we approach this exchange with openness and humility. We are equally interested in learning from Malawi's institutional journey and in identifying areas for sustained cooperation beyond this visit.

We remain committed to deepening South to South cooperation, supporting youth-centred policy innovation, and advancing the spirit and intent of the African Youth Charter as it enters its next chapter.

We trust that this engagement will strengthen institutional relationships, generate practical insight, and contribute to National Youth Service programmes that respond meaningfully to the realities young people face.

I wish the delegation a productive and successful learning visit.

Thank you.