



NATIONAL YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AGENCY
OUR YOUTH. OUR FUTURE.

**OFFICE OF THE
EXECUTIVE CHAIRPERSON**

**PRE SONA PRESIDENTIAL YOUTH
ENGAGEMENT – KHAYELITSHA, CAPE TOWN**

10 FEBRUARY 2026

SPEAKING NOTES BY THE EXECUTIVE CHAIRPERSON OF THE NYDA, DR. SUNSHINE MYENDE, ON THE OCCASION OF THE PRE SONA PRESIDENTIAL YOUTH ENGAGEMENT - *Remarks – Opening and Purpose of the day | ± 10 minutes*

10 February 2026

Programme Director,
His Excellency, President Cyril Ramaphosa,
Honourable Ministers and Deputy Ministers,
Members of Parliament,
Members of the NYDA Board and Management,
Our partners and stakeholders,
Young people of South Africa,

Good afternoon and welcome.

Ayeye bantu abasha ayeye!

On behalf of the National Youth Development Agency, I am honoured to welcome you to this Pre-SONA Presidential Youth Engagement, hosted here in belly of Khayelitsha.

Khayelitsha tells a powerful and honest story about our country. A story of struggle and resilience. Of constraint and creativity. Of the daily realities young people navigate as they try to build lives, livelihoods, and dignity.

This engagement holds particular significance for us as the NYDA. For the Agency, this is the single most important moment in the national calendar where the President of the Republic engages *directly* with us - and through us - with the lived realities of young people.

Unlike many other sectors, young people do not have a dedicated annual platform of this nature at the highest level of government. There is no equivalent moment where youth issues are consistently centred, interrogated, and responded to in this direct way.

For that reason Programme Director, this engagement is substantive. It is the moment where all hands must be on deck. Where youth development moves from policy to presence. And where, ahead of the State of the Nation Address, the voices and realities of young people are placed firmly at the centre of national attention. This is why we protect this engagement - and why it must remain annual.

This years Pre-SONA Youth Engagement exists for one fundamental reason: to check in on freedom. Not as an abstract ideal, but as a lived experience. It is a space where young people can ask, honestly and directly:

Are we still a priority?

Is freedom translating into opportunity?

Are the promises of democracy reaching young people where they live, work, and try to build livelihoods?

Youth unemployment, entrepreneurship, safety, and dignity should not be once-off conversations. They require continuity and accountability. And this engagement is one of the few moments where these converge.

This year also carries profound historical weight. We mark 50 years since the 1976 Soweto Uprising, when young people confronted injustice with courage and clarity. We mark 30 years since the finalisation of our Constitution, which enshrined dignity, equality, and freedom as binding commitments. And we mark 70 years since women marched to the Union Buildings, reminding us that freedom has always been advanced by the courage of women.

Mr President, these are not isolated anniversaries. They tell one continuous story - that freedom in South Africa has always been pushed forward by the young, defended by women, and secured through collective struggle. And so when we say "Freedom lives in every generation" – we are not sloganeering. It is a reminder that freedom is not inherited automatically. It must be renewed through action, protected through policy, and defended through delivery.

As we reflect on this today, it is important to acknowledge what *has moved* since the last State of the Nation Address.

Through the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention, and in partnership with government and the private sector:

- The Revitalised National Youth Service has created over 89,000 service opportunities, with nearly 90,000 young people proudly wearing the NYS badge - contributing to their communities while gaining skills and work experience.
- The launch of Phase 4 of the NYS will unlock a further 40,000 paid service opportunities, reinforcing service, learning, and transitions into work or enterprise.
- Through the JOBS Programme, and partnerships with SETAs and employers, young people continue to receive support with skills development, work readiness, work experience, and life skills.
- Platforms such as SAYouth.mobi and the National Pathway Management Network continue to connect young people to opportunities at scale.

These milestones demonstrate that when the state acts with intent, coordination, and focus, youth outcomes improve.

Members of Parliament, earlier today we engaged young entrepreneurs supported through the NYDA. They are often described as success stories - and they are. But

what emerged from those engagements was something more valuable: honest testimonies.

Some of the young people we met had struggled to find work, despite being graduates, and were forced to think creatively about survival. What began as hobbies - sewing, cleaning, baking - gradually became enterprises.

Nontsha Putuma identified a simple but powerful gap in her community: access to bread within walking distance. She shared how NYDA's support, particularly through equipment, enabled her bakery to meet growing demand. That intervention allowed her business not only to stabilise, but to create job opportunities for other young people, many of whom now reference her as a pathway into work and skills.

Luzuko Mayiji, who operates a township-based Tshisanyama business, shared that his challenge was never a lack of customers, but it is the demand that existed. What constrained his growth was capacity. Through NYDA's equipment support, he was able to meet demand more efficiently, stabilise production, create and sustain jobs.

Ayanda Masiza, operating in the laundry services sector, shared that she has adapted her business model to focus on collection and delivery services - reducing visibility in order to avoid intimidation and extortion, while still meeting client needs.

These stories showed the real impact of targeted state support and the strategic intelligence young entrepreneurs apply simply to survive.

As we listened to these stories earlier today, I was reminded of the words of Koleka Putuma, who writes that *"Survival is a language young people have learned fluently."*

That fluency is evident here. Young people are not short of ideas or ambition. What they are often short of is protection, scale, certainty and access. And when survival becomes the primary language, growth becomes fragile.

These engagements also revealed a harder truth. Many young entrepreneurs operate under conditions of constant risk. Some face extortion - paying simply to trade. Others avoid signage, containers, or fixed infrastructure because visibility increases vulnerability.

Young people are hesitant to scale because growth attracts danger. In these contexts, entrepreneurship requires courage simply to exist.

What also became clear is that young entrepreneurs are not passive in the face of these challenges. In the absence of guaranteed safety, they have been forced to innovate their own protection strategies. They adapt how they market, how they deliver services, and how visible their businesses are. They build discreet marketing linkages, rely on trusted networks, shift to digital platforms, and rethink growth models altogether.

This innovation speaks to resilience, but it also exposes a gap. There is a growing need for structured guidance and practical tools to support young people operating in hostile environments. Toolkits that help entrepreneurs think through safety-conscious growth, risk-aware expansion, alternative marketing approaches, and how to leverage partnerships that reduce exposure.

Equally important is the need for cross-sector collaboration. Young entrepreneurs cannot navigate these conditions alone. There is a need to better leverage complementary sectors - from digital platforms and logistics, to financial services, community safety structures, and local government - so that businesses grow through ecosystems, not isolation.

And so, Mr President, this engagement creates an important opportunity. An opportunity to reflect on how the state, working with its partners, can better support young entrepreneurs operating in hostile environments. How do we enable businesses to grow without forcing them into invisibility? How do we protect young entrepreneurs so that success does not make them targets? And how do we strengthen collaboration across safety, justice, local government, and economic sectors to ensure that entrepreneurship is viable, visible, and safe?

We look forward to your reflections on this matter.

Programme Director, as we move into the round-table discussion with the President, we do so mindful of the weight of this moment. In the words of Panashe Chigumadzi: *"History is not behind us; it is asking us what we will do with it."*

Today is our opportunity to answer that question - together.
This Pre-SONA Presidential Youth Engagement is officially open.

Thank you.