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NATIONAL YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AGENCY
OUR YOUTH. OUR FUTURE.

SPEAKING NOTES FOR EXECUTIVE CHAIRPERSON
DR SUNSHINE MYENDE

BRICS+ DIALOGUE ON SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION





11 NOVEMBER 2026

SPEAKING NOTES BY THE EXECUTIVE CHAIRPERSON OF THE NYDA ON THE OCCASION OF THE BRICS DIALOGUE ON SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION – *Remarks | ±5 minutes*

11 November 2026

Programme Director,

Distinguished representatives of BRICS member states,

Government officials,

Fellow young people, innovators, researchers and entrepreneurs,

Good afternoon

It is a privilege to participate in this dialogue at a time when scientific and technological advancement is reshaping economies, industries and societies. The future of scientific and technological innovation will not be determined by technology alone. It will also depend on whether countries prepare their young people to participate in, shape and benefit from that innovation.

For South Africa, this begins with our National Youth Policy 2020–2030. The policy recognises that youth development is interconnected: young people need education and skills, economic opportunities, good health, social inclusion and institutions that respond to their needs. These are not separate from innovation. They are the foundations that determine who gets to participate in it.

The policy's first priority, quality education, skills and second chances, is particularly important. It speaks to building the scientific, digital and technical capabilities young people need to engage with emerging technologies. Its second priority, economic transformation, entrepreneurship and job creation, addresses what happens next: whether young people can turn those capabilities into ideas, enterprises, products and decent work.

The remaining priorities are equally important. Health and wellbeing influence young people's ability to learn and participate. Social cohesion and nation-building require that innovation serves society and does not deepen exclusion. Effective and responsive youth development institutions are essential to connecting young people to opportunities and ensuring that policy commitments translate into practical support.

Our National Youth Policy is complemented
by South Africa's Science, Technology and Innovation White Paper and Decadal Plan 2022–2032. Together, these frameworks support an important national ambition: building an inclusive innovation system in which young people are not simply future beneficiaries, but contributors to solving present and future challenges.

This requires deliberate attention to who is included. Young women, young people with disabilities, rural youth and those from under-resourced communities must have meaningful access to STEM education, digital skills, innovation infrastructure, mentorship, finance and markets. Talent is distributed across our societies; opportunity is not. Public policy must help close that gap.

South Africa's commitment to scientific innovation is also reflected in its longstanding cooperation with China, beginning with the 1999 Agreement on Scientific and Technological Cooperation and strengthened through subsequent agreements, including the 2023 Science and Technology MoU and the 2024 bilateral commitments on emerging technologies.

These frameworks help create an enabling environment for initiatives such as the Technology Innovation Agency's Grassroots Innovation Programme, which has supported innovators such as Namhla Dotwana in 2025, and the South Africa-China Young Scientist Symposium held in June this year. They demonstrate how policy and institutional partnerships can translate into opportunities for young innovators.

The National Youth Development Agency contributes to this enabling environment by connecting young people to skills development, entrepreneurship support, funding opportunities, partnerships and markets. Our role is to help bridge the distance between a young person having an idea or capability and being able to develop it into an opportunity.

Our engagements with Chinese partners offer another example of how international relationships can complement domestic policy. The NYDA's agreements with the Belt and Road Initiative General Chamber of Commerce for Southern Africa and Cathay Global establish frameworks for cooperation in areas including skills development, technology, youth entrepreneurship and the electric-motorcycle ecosystem.

In May, five young South African content creators participated in a leadership programme in China, gaining exposure to artificial intelligence, robotics and advanced manufacturing. In September, our participation in the China–Africa Youth Development Project Matchmaking in Changsha created further engagement with institutions, entrepreneurs and investors around practical project and partnership

opportunities. These are avenues to explore
and develop; their value will ultimately depend on the opportunities they create for young people.

As BRICS countries, our national contexts and policy instruments may differ, but we share a responsibility to ensure that young people can participate meaningfully in the innovation economy. Allow me to offer three areas for consideration:

First, strengthen youth access to science, technology, engineering and mathematics education, digital skills and research opportunities, particularly for young people from underserved communities.

Second, build clearer pathways from youth innovation to implementation by connecting young innovators with mentorship, incubation, intellectual property support, financing, industry partners and markets.

Third, expand structured exchanges among young researchers, entrepreneurs, universities and innovation institutions so that knowledge, expertise and practical solutions can move across our countries.

We should measure progress not only by the technologies developed or agreements signed, but by who gains the skills, resources and opportunities to participate - and whose lives are improved by the solutions we create.

A youth-centred innovation system does not happen by chance. It is built through deliberate policy, inclusive institutions and sustained investment in young people.

Let us ensure that our policies do more than prepare young people for a changing world. Let them equip young people to change it.

I thank you.