



**SPEAKING NOTES FOR EXECUTIVE CHAIRPERSON
DR SUNSHINE MYENDE**

**BRICS YOUTH THEMATIC SESSION – COUNTRY
STATEMENT**

24 JUNE 2026

**SPEAKING NOTES BY THE EXECUTIVE CHAIRPERSON OF THE NYDA ON THE
OCCASION OF THE BRICS YOUTH THEMATIC SESSION – *Country Statement* |
±5 minutes**

24 June 2026

*Distinguished Chairperson,
Representatives of BRICS Member States,
Youth Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

On behalf of the Republic of South Africa, I wish to express our appreciation to the Government of India for its leadership of BRICS in 2026 and for convening this important Youth Thematic Session under the theme, “Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability.”

South Africa welcomes the continued elevation of youth development within the BRICS agenda. The theme chosen by India reflects many of the realities confronting young people across our countries and provides an important framework for advancing practical cooperation among member states.

While our national contexts differ, many of our young people face similar challenges. These include unemployment, inequality, barriers to economic participation, digital exclusion, the effects of climate change, and the need to navigate a rapidly changing world of work. At the same time, young people continue to demonstrate extraordinary resilience, innovation and determination in shaping solutions to these challenges.

For South Africa, youth development remains both a constitutional imperative and a strategic national priority. We believe that sustainable development can only be achieved when young people are able to participate meaningfully in the social, economic and democratic life of their countries.

In this regard, South Africa continues to invest in programmes that strengthen youth employability, entrepreneurship, skills development and economic participation.

Through the National Youth Development Agency and partnerships across government, business and civil society, young entrepreneurs are supported through business development services, enterprise development interventions and access to funding opportunities. These initiatives are intended not only to support business sustainability but also to stimulate local economic development and job creation.

In addition, South Africa continues to implement interventions aimed at expanding pathways into employment. Through the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention



and related programmes, thousands of young people have been connected to paid opportunities, workplace experience, training initiatives and employment pathways. These interventions remain critical in addressing barriers to labour market entry and supporting young people as they transition into the economy.

As we reflect on education, entrepreneurship and future readiness, South Africa recognises that the changing nature of work requires a renewed focus on skills development and innovation.

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence, automation and digital technologies is transforming economies across the world. To respond effectively to these changes, we are strengthening investments in digital literacy, coding, robotics, innovation and technology-driven entrepreneurship. Through partnerships with educational institutions, innovation ecosystems and global initiatives such as I AM THE CODE, young people are increasingly being equipped with future-oriented skills that will enable them to participate meaningfully in the digital economy.

South Africa also believes that stronger collaboration between government, industry, research institutions and academia will be essential in unlocking innovation-led growth and ensuring that young people are active contributors to scientific advancement and technological development.

Programme Director,

Economic participation alone is not sufficient if development remains inaccessible to certain groups of young people.

South Africa therefore remains committed to advancing inclusive youth development. Particular attention continues to be directed towards supporting young women, young persons with disabilities, rural youth and other historically marginalised groups, including LGBTQIA+ young people.

The implementation of the NYDA Youth with Disabilities Strategy, NYDA Rural Strategy and related inclusion programmes reflects our commitment to ensuring that opportunities for participation, leadership and economic advancement are accessible to all young people. We remain convinced that inclusion is not only a social imperative but a developmental necessity. Societies that create opportunities for all young people are ultimately more innovative, more cohesive and more resilient.

South Africa further recognises that youth wellbeing extends beyond economic participation. Mental health, physical wellbeing and access to supportive social environments remain critical determinants of positive youth development.

Investments in youth health, sport and recreation therefore continue to play an important role in building resilience, social cohesion and long-term developmental outcomes.



With regard to sustainability and environmental responsibility, South Africa welcomes the increasing role that young people are playing in advancing climate action and green innovation. Across our countries, young people are contributing to renewable energy solutions, sustainable agriculture, environmental advocacy and community-based climate resilience initiatives. We believe there is significant scope for greater BRICS cooperation in the development of green skills, environmental innovation and youth-led responses to climate challenges.

Equally important is the role of people-to-people cooperation in strengthening mutual understanding among our nations.

South Africa supports the expansion of youth exchanges, cultural cooperation, volunteerism and platforms for dialogue among young people across BRICS member states. Such initiatives create opportunities for learning, collaboration and the development of long-term partnerships that strengthen solidarity among young people of the Global South.

Distinguished delegates,

As we look ahead, South Africa believes that BRICS cooperation should increasingly focus on practical areas of collaboration that deliver measurable outcomes for young people.

This includes strengthening cooperation in digital skills development, artificial intelligence and innovation; expanding opportunities for youth entrepreneurship and enterprise development; deepening collaboration on inclusive youth development and accessibility; promoting youth mobility and exchange programmes; and supporting youth-led responses to sustainability and climate-related challenges.

The strength of BRICS lies in our collective ability to share experiences, learn from one another and develop solutions that respond to the realities of our people. For young people in particular, cooperation among our member states presents a valuable opportunity to expand access to knowledge, innovation, employment and leadership opportunities.

South Africa therefore looks forward to continued collaboration with fellow BRICS member states as we work collectively to build resilient, innovative, inclusive and sustainable societies that respond to the aspirations and potential of young people.

I thank you.