



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

**CHINA-AFRICA YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROJECT  
MATCHMAKING, CHANGSHA**



**18 SEPTEMBER 2026**

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**SPEAKING NOTES BY THE EXECUTIVE  
CHAIRPERSON OF THE NYDA ON THE OCCASION OF THE CHINA AFRICA  
YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROJECT MATCHMAKING – Remarks | ±5 minutes**

18 September 2026

*Distinguished representatives of the Government of the People's Republic of China,  
Leaders of the All-China Youth Federation and the China International Youth  
Exchange Center,  
Representatives of the Hunan Provincial Government and the China–Africa Youth  
Innovation and Entrepreneurship Base,  
Esteemed business leaders, entrepreneurs and investors,  
Fellow young leaders,*

Good morning, and thank you for the warm welcome to Changsha.

I would like to begin by reflecting on why this room matters. In South Africa today, 47.4% of young people between the ages of 15 and 34 are without work, representing nearly 5.6 million young people. Addressing this challenge requires more than programmes and good intentions. It requires access to markets, buyers, contracts, capital and the capabilities that allow young people and their enterprises to compete.

South Africa and China have built one of Africa's most substantial economic partnerships. Bilateral trade and Chinese investment in South Africa is growing at an exponential rate, supporting economic activity and livelihoods.

Our relationship has therefore developed well beyond the question of whether we should trade with one another. The opportunity before us now is to deepen that relationship, broaden participation in it and progressively shift its composition towards higher-value trade, greater productive capacity and stronger opportunities for our respective enterprises. We are already seeing what this can mean in practice.

South African qualifying exports are benefiting from China's temporary zero-tariff preference scheme, subject to the applicable rules of origin and other requirements. Just a few days ago, South Africa signed a protocol opening the Chinese market to our cherry producers for the first time. This gives South African producers access to a market that imported nearly 587,000 tonnes of cherries, in 2025, with the new market access expected to support approximately 600 jobs. Discussions on market access for South African blueberries are also progressing.



These developments demonstrate what can be achieved when institutions work together to remove barriers and create opportunities for producers.

The next step is to ensure that our enterprises are able to take advantage of those opportunities. Market access needs to be accompanied by market readiness, reliable supply, appropriate standards, investment, distribution networks and relationships with buyers.

This is where Hunan is particularly significant. South Africa is Hunan's largest trading partner on the African continent, and that relationship continues to grow, supported by cooperation in manufacturing, machinery, electric vehicles, batteries and the new energy economy. Hunan has also positioned itself as an important platform for deepening China–Africa economic and trade cooperation.

For the National Youth Development Agency, today's engagement also builds on an existing relationship. We have previously worked alongside the All-China Youth Federation in youth-focused engagements, including the BRICS Youth Dialogue on Science and Technology in Fujian last year, where the emphasis was on youth-led innovation. Today's platform provides an opportunity to extend that cooperation into the commercial sphere.

The China–Africa Youth Innovation and Entrepreneurship Base itself provides an important model. It has welcomed national-level incubators from a number of countries, established relationships with institutions and enterprises across Africa, and supported cooperation in areas including drones, solar power and agriculture. These are practical examples of how structured matchmaking can help move ideas and relationships towards commercial cooperation.

South Africa wants to ensure that more of our young entrepreneurs can participate in these kinds of opportunities.

The National Youth Development Agency is therefore not approaching this engagement only from the perspective of youth development programmes. Through initiatives such as I AM THE CODE, we are supporting young South Africans to develop capabilities in areas including artificial intelligence, coding, robotics, fintech and agritech. Our responsibility is to ensure that young people are prepared not only for the economy that exists today, but also for the economy that is being shaped through technological change, new industries and international partnerships.

There are significant areas of complementarity between our two economies. These include agro-processing, advanced manufacturing, electric vehicles, renewable energy, critical minerals, digital technology, pharmaceuticals and logistics.



South African enterprises can become suppliers into Chinese value chains. Chinese companies can partner with South African businesses to expand local production and develop local suppliers. Technology and skills partnerships can strengthen capabilities that remain within our economies beyond individual projects. Investment in South Africa can also provide Chinese companies with a platform from which to participate more extensively in the wider African market.

For young entrepreneurs, this means creating pathways into these value chains through supplier development, procurement opportunities, incubation, mentorship, technology transfer, skills development, distribution partnerships and investment.

At the same time, this must be a partnership in which both sides bring value. South African enterprises must be prepared to meet international standards, demonstrate quality and reliability, understand their markets and build the capacity necessary to fulfil commercial opportunities. Chinese partners can contribute through technology, finance, manufacturing expertise, market knowledge and distribution networks.

When these capabilities are connected effectively, youth development becomes part of broader economic development. It creates the possibility for young people not simply to establish businesses, but to become suppliers, innovators, exporters and long-term participants in regional and global value chains.

That is ultimately what we would like to see emerge from today's engagement.

We should leave this room with relationships that continue beyond this programme: entrepreneurs connected to potential buyers, businesses connected to investors, innovators connected to technology partners, and young South African enterprises connected to Chinese and African value chains.

The National Youth Development Agency is ready to contribute to that process by identifying capable young entrepreneurs, strengthening their readiness to participate in international markets, and helping to connect them to opportunities emerging through South Africa–China cooperation.

South Africa and China have already established a strong foundation for economic cooperation. Our responsibility now is to build on that foundation in ways that increase value, strengthen productive capacity and create meaningful opportunities for the next generation.

I hope that today's conversations will therefore lead to practical partnerships and sustained engagement long after we leave Changsha.



Thank you.