



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

**FUTURE OF WORK AND BUSINESS CONFERENCE
FREEDOM PARK, PRETORIA**

10 JUNE 2026



SPEAKING NOTES BY THE EXECUTIVE CHAIRPERSON OF THE NYDA ON THE OCCASION OF THE FUTURE OF WORK AND BUSINESS CONFERENCE –

Message of support | ±10 minutes

10 June 2026

*Programme Director, Councillor Fortune Mampuru,
The Minister of Employment and Labour, Honourable Nomakhosazana Meth,
The Deputy Minister of Communications and Digital Technologies, Honourable
Mondli Gungubele,
Representatives of the Executive Mayor and leadership of the City of Tshwane,
The Chairperson of the ETDP SETA Board and Dean of Students at the University of
South Africa, Dr Olwethu Sipuka,
The Member of the Mayoral Committee for Roads and Transport in the City of
Tshwane, Councillor Tlangi Mogale,
The Chairperson of the Wholesale and Retail SETA Board, Mr Thulani Tshafuta,
The leadership of Enterprise Capital,
The leadership of the Tshwane University of Technology and the Institute for the
Future of Work,
Leadership and representatives of the Sector Education and Training Authorities,
Representatives of government departments and public entities,
Representatives of organised business and organised labour,
Representatives of the Tshwane Automotive Special Economic Zone and industry
partners,
Representatives of the Youth Employment Service, Harambee, SEDFA and our
youth development partners,
Entrepreneurs, innovators and captains of industry,
Members of academia and research institutions,
Members of the media,
Distinguished guests,
And most importantly, the young people gathered here today,*

Good morning

It is a privilege to join you at the inaugural Future of Work and Business Conference, taking place during a month of profound significance for our country.

As South Africans, we gather in June to honour the courage, sacrifice and determination of the generation of 1976. We remember young people who understood that education was not simply about classrooms and textbooks. It was about dignity, opportunity and the right to participate fully in society.

Fifty years later, our responsibility is different, but no less urgent. The defining challenge of our generation is to ensure that young people are equipped not only to



participate in the economy of today, but to thrive in the economy of tomorrow. Because while the title speaks about the future of work and business, the real subject of our conversation is people.

It is about whether young people will have a meaningful place in the economy that is emerging before us, whether innovation will deepen inequality or expand opportunity, whether technological advancement will benefit the many or remain the preserve of a fortunate few, and it is about whether South Africa is preparing itself adequately for a rapidly changing world.

Today, we find ourselves living through one of the most significant periods of economic and technological transformation in modern history. Artificial intelligence is reshaping industries. Automation is changing how goods and services are produced. Digital platforms are redefining entrepreneurship and commerce. New occupations are emerging while others are disappearing. The pace of change is accelerating.

Yet while technology is evolving rapidly, one reality remains unchanged. Millions of young people continue to struggle to access meaningful economic opportunities.

According to Statistics South Africa, millions of young South Africans remain unemployed, while many more remain outside education, employment and training opportunities altogether. According to the latest labour market data, more than 4.7 million young South Africans between the ages of 15 and 34 remain unemployed, while many more remain outside education, employment and training opportunities altogether. This reality should concern all of us. Because the greatest risk facing our country is not technological disruption itself. The greatest risk is exclusion.

The risk that a rapidly advancing economy leaves behind those who already face significant barriers to participation. The risk that the gap between those with access to opportunity and those without continues to widen.

In many respects, we are living in two South Africas at the same time. One South Africa is experimenting with artificial intelligence, advanced manufacturing, digital innovation and new economic possibilities. The other continues to struggle with unemployment, poverty and limited access to opportunity. The challenge before us is to ensure that these two South Africas do not drift further apart.

This is why I believe that South Africa requires nothing less than a skills revolution. The urgency of this task is reflected in global research. The World Economic Forum estimates that nearly 40% of workers' core skills are expected to change by 2030 as technological transformation continues to reshape economies and industries across the world. The future economy will reward adaptability. It will reward innovation, problem solving, creativity and those who possess the knowledge and capabilities required to navigate constant change.

The question before us, therefore, is not whether technological transformation is coming. The question we should be answering is whether we are moving fast enough to prepare our young people for that reality. Importantly, the future of work



should not be understood narrowly as a conversation about jobs alone. It is also a conversation about entrepreneurship, innovation, ownership and value creation.

Moreover, the future economy will reward those who identify opportunities, solve problems and build solutions. It will reward young entrepreneurs who harness technology to grow businesses. It will reward innovators who develop products and services that respond to real-world challenges. It will reward creators, freelancers, digital professionals and those who are able to compete in an increasingly connected global economy. For this reason, young people must not only be prepared to enter the labour market. They must be empowered to shape it as well.

As the National Youth Development Agency, we are particularly conscious that conversations about the future of work must be inclusive. And as we discuss technological advancement, we must also ask who risks being left behind. We must think about young women entering industries where they remain underrepresented. We must think about young persons with disabilities and LGBTQIA+ youth who continue to face barriers to participation despite possessing immense talent and potential. We must think about young people living in rural communities where access to digital infrastructure remains uneven. We must think about young people in townships and informal settlements whose aspirations are often greater than the opportunities available to them.

The future of work must not become the privilege of a few. It must become the promise of an entire generation.

Research from around the world increasingly shows that the future will not belong to those who compete against technology. It will belong to those who know how to work alongside it. While machines may perform routine tasks more efficiently, human beings will continue to be valued for what makes us uniquely human: creativity, ethical judgement, leadership, critical thinking, collaboration and empathy. These are not soft skills. They are future skills. And they will become increasingly important in a technology-driven world.

As Africans, we must also ask ourselves an important question. If artificial intelligence is shaping the future of humanity, where are African voices in its design, governance and ownership? Will we merely consume technologies developed elsewhere? Or will we become active participants in building the solutions that shape our future?

Africa cannot afford to be a spectator in the Fourth Industrial Revolution. We must be builders, innovators, producers of knowledge and technology. And we must ensure that young Africans are at the centre of that journey.

Achieving this vision will require partnership. Government cannot do it alone. Business cannot do it alone. Universities cannot do it alone. SETAs cannot do it alone.



The future of work conversation cannot begin when a young person is already searching for employment. It must begin much earlier in our schools, it must then continue in our TVET colleges and institutions of higher learning. It must further be strengthened through innovation hubs, entrepreneurship ecosystems, mentorship programmes and skills development initiatives. And it must be supported by deliberate collaboration across every sector of society.

This conference represents exactly the kind of partnership we need. It brings together government, business, labour, academia and young people around a shared commitment to building a more inclusive and competitive economy. As the NYDA, we remain committed to supporting initiatives that expand access to skills development, entrepreneurship, innovation and meaningful economic participation.

We remain committed to ensuring that no young person is excluded from opportunity because of the circumstances into which they were born. And we remain committed to working alongside partners who understand that investing in young people is not an act of charity, but an investment in South Africa's future prosperity.

Programme Director, as I conclude. Somewhere in South Africa today, there is a young person holding a device more powerful than the computers that once helped send human beings to the moon. Yet that same young person may still lack access to opportunity, mentorship, capital or a pathway into the economy. Technology alone cannot close that gap. It is people who can, partnerships, leadership and deliberate action that can close that gap.

Fifty years ago, young people demanded access to a better future. Today, our responsibility is to ensure that future is accessible to every young person, regardless of where they come from, what language they speak, whether they live in a village, township or city, and whether they are with a disability.

As we engage throughout this conference, let us focus not only on the technologies that will shape the future. Let us focus on the people who must benefit from that future. And when we gather again in the years ahead, may we measure our success not by the number of conversations we have had, but by the number of young lives transformed through skills, innovation, entrepreneurship and meaningful economic participation.

The future is not something that happens to us. It is something we build. Together.

I thank you.