



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

**KZN YOUTH PARLIAMENT
ADVANCING YOUTH EMPLOYMENT,
ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND ECONOMIC
PARTICIPATION**

17 JUNE 2026

**SPEAKING NOTES BY THE EXECUTIVE CHAIRPERSON OF THE NYDA ON THE
OCCASION OF THE KWAZULU NATAL YOUTH PARLIAMENT – Address | ±10
minutes**

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*Programme Director,
Honourable Speaker,
Honourable Premier,
Honourable Members of the Legislature,
Executive Mayors, Traditional Leaders and Councillors,
Distinguished guests,
Young people of KwaZulu-Natal,*

As we gather under the Youth Month theme "Reset@50: The Future Calls," I believe there is one question that should guide our deliberations today: what does freedom mean to a young person who has an education but no opportunity, who has talent but no market, who has ambition but no pathway to realise it?

For many families across KwaZulu-Natal, unemployment is not an economic indicator discussed in policy documents. It is the graduate who leaves home every morning carrying a file of qualifications and returns in the evening having heard nothing. It is the grandmother whose social grant stretches across three generations. It is the young woman with an innovative business idea who cannot access capital, markets or mentorship. It is the gifted artisan repairing machinery in a backyard because formal opportunities remain out of reach.

The reality is that young people are not short of ideas. They are too often short of access. And as we commemorate the legacy of June 1976, we should remember that the young people who took to the streets did not simply fight for education. They fought for agency. They believed that knowledge should unlock possibility and that dignity should never be determined by circumstance. The challenge before our



generation is to ensure that education leads to economic participation and that opportunity is not reserved for the privileged few.

I therefore submit that the unfinished business of our democracy is not political freedom alone. It is economic participation. And the bridge between freedom and prosperity is a Skills Revolution.

When I speak of a Skills Revolution, I am not referring to another slogan or another programme. I am referring to a national commitment to ensure that every young South African acquires the technical skills, digital fluency, entrepreneurial mindset and adaptive capability required to thrive in an economy that is changing faster than at any other point in our history.

The future will not reward nations simply because they possess natural resources. It will reward nations that develop human capability, cultivate innovation and continuously invest in learning.

This is why I believe there are five strategic shifts that South Africa must make if we are serious about advancing youth employment, entrepreneurship and economic participation.

The first shift is from qualifications to capabilities. For too long, we have celebrated graduation ceremonies without asking whether graduates possess the skills demanded by a rapidly evolving economy. Qualifications remain important, but qualifications alone cannot guarantee participation. We must produce problem-solvers, innovators, digital thinkers, artisans, engineers, technicians and entrepreneurs who are equipped not only for today's economy but for the economy that is still emerging.

The second shift is from job-seeking to job creation. Employment will remain an important pathway for millions of young people, but employment cannot be our only measure of success. We must nurture a generation that is equally confident creating enterprises, employing others and building new industries. Entrepreneurship should never be viewed as a fallback after unemployment. It should be recognised as a primary driver of inclusive economic growth.

The third shift is from fragmented interventions to a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach. Youth development cannot be the responsibility of the NYDA alone. It cannot belong only to one department or one sphere of government. Every MEC, every municipality, every public entity, every university, every business and every community organisation should be able to account for its contribution to expanding opportunities for young people.



Every public policy is ultimately youth policy. Transport determines whether a young person can reach work. Housing determines whether families can access economic centres. Broadband determines whether entrepreneurs can compete globally. Agriculture determines whether rural youth remain economically active. Procurement determines whether youth-owned businesses survive.

If every budget tabled before this Legislature were assessed against one simple question, how does this expand opportunity for young people, I have no doubt that our development trajectory would look fundamentally different.

The fourth shift is from programmes to ecosystems. Government cannot simply provide interventions in isolation. It must deliberately create environments where innovation flourishes, businesses grow and partnerships thrive. This means simplifying regulation, opening procurement opportunities, strengthening mentorship, improving access to finance and building networks that enable sustainable enterprise development.

The fifth shift is from exclusion to access. The child growing up in Mthwalume, Harding or Nongoma should not inherit fewer opportunities because of geography. The young woman in rural KwaZulu-Natal should have the same confidence that she belongs in engineering laboratories, artificial intelligence research centres and technology companies as anyone else. Economic participation cannot remain concentrated in urban centres while talent exists in every corner of our province. KwaZulu-Natal itself demonstrates why this conversation matters.

This province is home to one of Africa's busiest ports. It possesses world-class tourism assets, fertile agricultural land, expanding manufacturing capacity and enormous potential in the ocean economy and logistics sectors. Yet too many young people remain disconnected from these opportunities. Our challenge is not the absence of economic potential. Our challenge is ensuring that young people become active participants in shaping these industries rather than passive observers of their growth.

This is precisely why the Skills Revolution must prepare young people for the future economy. Artificial intelligence, automation, cybersecurity, renewable energy, advanced manufacturing, digital commerce, agritech and the creative economy are no longer distant possibilities. They are today's realities. If we continue preparing young people for yesterday's labour market, we will fail them long before they enter it.



The National Youth Development Agency exists because South Africa recognised that investing in young people is not expenditure. It is nation-building.

Through entrepreneurship support, business development services, labour activation programmes, National Youth Service initiatives and flagship outreach platforms such as Phanda Thursdays, we have seen first-hand what happens when policy meets potential. We have watched young entrepreneurs transform modest support into thriving enterprises. We have seen unemployed graduates become employers. We have seen communities strengthened because one young person was given an opportunity to succeed.

These experiences remind us that young people are not asking government to build their futures for them. They are asking government to remove unnecessary barriers so that they can build those futures themselves.

The isiZulu philosophy of Ubuntu teaches us that our humanity is realised through one another. Economic participation reflects that same principle. When a young entrepreneur succeeds, families are sustained, communities prosper and local economies expand. When a young farmer increases production, food security improves. When a software developer creates a digital solution, new markets emerge. Investing in one young person often transforms many lives.

Government must therefore lead, but it cannot act alone. Business must invest in youth potential. Educational institutions must remain responsive to changing economic realities. Communities must mentor and support emerging talent. Families must nurture aspiration. Young people themselves must continue to innovate, organise and seize opportunity. This shared responsibility is what will determine whether South Africa competes successfully in the twenty-first century.

The youth of 1976 challenged the content of education because they understood that education determines power. The responsibility of our generation is to ensure that education leads to productive participation, that skills lead to innovation, that innovation leads to enterprise and that enterprise leads to shared prosperity. That is how we honour their legacy - not through commemoration alone, but through transformation.

History will not judge us by the number of speeches we delivered about young people or the number of policies we adopted. It will judge us by whether a child born in rural KwaZulu-Natal believed that their future could extend as far as their talent and determination would take them, and whether our institutions did everything possible to make that belief a reality.



If we embrace a genuine Skills Revolution, if we position entrepreneurship as a pillar of economic transformation, if we build ecosystems instead of isolated programmes and if we ensure that economic participation becomes the unfinished business of our democracy, then the greatest export of KwaZulu-Natal will not leave through the Port of Durban.

It will be the ideas, the innovations, the enterprises and the leadership of its young people reaching every corner of South Africa, the African continent and the world. That is the future calling.

And I believe it is time for all of us to answer.

I thank you.