



SPEAKING NOTES FOR EXECUTIVE CHAIRPERSON
DR SUNSHINE MYENDE

**MANDELA DAY OUTREACH
EMBALENHLE, SECUNDA**

17 JULY 2026



SPEAKING NOTES BY THE EXECUTIVE

CHAIRPERSON OF THE NYDA ON THE OCCASION OF THE MANDELA DAY

OUTREACH – Keynote Address | ±15 – 30 minutes

17 July 2026

Programme Director;

Representatives of Government;

Our implementing partner, Youth Life;

Representatives of municipalities, schools, civil society and organised community structures;

Traditional and community leaders;

Members of the media;

Most importantly, the young people of Embalenhle;

Ladies and gentlemen.

It is a privilege to join you on this significant day as we commemorate the life and enduring legacy of President Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela. Across South Africa and around the world, Mandela Day invites us to reflect on the values that defined his life: selfless service, human dignity, active citizenship and an unwavering commitment to improving the lives of others.

While these values have become synonymous with the annual observance of Mandela Day, they should never be confined to a single day on the calendar. Their true meaning lies in how they shape the way we govern, how we serve communities and how we create opportunities for those who have been left furthest behind.

For the National Youth Development Agency, Mandela Day therefore presents more than an opportunity to commemorate history. It presents an opportunity to demonstrate what responsive government looks like. It challenges us to ask whether our programmes merely acknowledge the challenges confronting young people or whether they genuinely change their circumstances. It demands that we move beyond symbolic gestures and towards interventions that restore hope, expand access and improve livelihoods.



Today is important because we are not only honouring Nelson Mandela's legacy through community service, but we are demonstrating that service must ultimately translate into opportunity, because meaningful service without sustainable opportunity cannot transform lives.

A few weeks ago, the NYDA stood alongside this community during the launch of Phanda Thursday. We deliberately chose to bring government services directly into the community because we recognise a reality that many young South Africans experience every day.

Too often, opportunity is concentrated in urban centres, while the cost of accessing that opportunity is carried by unemployed young people. Many spend money they do not have travelling between government offices, printing copies of CVs and standing in queues in the hope that someone will eventually open a door. For many others, repeated disappointment has gradually replaced hope with resignation.

It is against this backdrop that the NYDA introduced Phanda Thursday. It is not simply another outreach campaign, another activation or another event on a government calendar. It represents a deliberate shift in the way we think about public service.

Rather than expecting young people to find government, government must find young people. Rather than requiring communities to navigate fragmented systems of support, public institutions must work together to bring services into the spaces where people live. Phanda Thursday is therefore built on a simple but powerful principle: opportunity should be accessible, visible and responsive to the lived realities of young people.

When our officials established the NYDA service point in Embalenhle, hundreds of young people entrusted us with their curriculum vitae. To many observers, those CVs may have appeared to be ordinary documents collected during another community engagement. We understood them differently. Each CV represented an individual story, a family hoping for economic relief, a graduate searching for a first opportunity, a young entrepreneur seeking a foothold, or a young person refusing to surrender to the reality of unemployment. We knew that accepting those CVs also meant accepting a responsibility. Government cannot ask citizens to trust its programmes if it has no intention of responding to that trust.

Today, we return to the very community where those CVs were received, not to repeat the promises that were made, but to demonstrate that those promises were accompanied by action. Through the collaborative work undertaken with our implementing partners, 670 young people are today being called back for recruitment opportunities. This is a significant milestone because it demonstrates the purpose of



the Phanda Thursday model. It is not designed to collect data or generate attendance figures. It is designed to connect young people with real opportunities through credible partnerships that extend the reach of government and improve the efficiency of service delivery.

The success of this initiative also reminds us that addressing youth unemployment requires a collective national effort. The NYDA has never claimed that it can solve the unemployment crisis alone. No single institution possesses the resources, expertise or reach to overcome one of South Africa's greatest socio-economic challenges. Our role is to convene, coordinate and catalyse partnerships that enable opportunity to reach communities at scale.

When government works alongside implementing partners, municipalities, educational institutions, civil society organisations and the private sector, we create pathways that would not exist if each institution acted in isolation. Today's recruitment process is therefore a practical demonstration of what collaborative governance can achieve when every partner is committed to a shared outcome.

It is equally fitting that these opportunities are being created on Mandela Day because they speak directly to the philosophy that underpins the Revitalised National Youth Service. President Mandela believed that citizenship carried with it both rights and responsibilities.

The Revitalised National Youth Service reflects that belief by creating opportunities for young people to contribute meaningfully to their communities while simultaneously developing the skills, work experience and capabilities that will strengthen their long-term employability. It is a programme that recognises that community service and economic participation are not competing objectives. On the contrary, they reinforce one another by ensuring that young people gain practical experience while making tangible contributions to the development of their communities.

Today's operational launch therefore represents an important transition. It marks the point at which commitment becomes implementation. Young people who previously registered their interest will now move into structured service, formal induction, contracting and deployment across schools and community sites identified through the implementation process.

They will support literacy initiatives, environmental programmes, learner support, community outreach and other developmental interventions that respond directly to local needs while building their own experience and expanding their future prospects. This is the essence of the Revitalised National Youth Service: creating



public value while preparing young people
for meaningful participation in the economy.

As the NYDA, we remain guided by the National Youth Policy 2030, the Integrated Youth Development Strategy, the National Development Plan and the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention, all of which recognise that South Africa's future depends on the extent to which we are able to unlock the potential of our young people. These policy frameworks consistently remind us that youth development cannot be reduced to isolated programmes.

It requires integrated interventions that connect education, skills development, work experience, entrepreneurship and social inclusion into a coherent pathway towards economic participation. The work we are undertaking here in Embalenhle reflects that integrated approach because it combines recruitment, service, skills development and progression into future opportunities within a single ecosystem of support.

To the young people gathered here today, I want to say that your presence here is evidence that you have chosen hope over despair. Whether you are among those being called back today or whether your opportunity lies ahead, do not underestimate the value of remaining engaged. Every successful career begins with a first opportunity, and every opportunity begins with the willingness to participate.

Continue developing your skills, continue seeking information, continue registering for programmes and continue believing that your aspirations deserve to be realised. The NYDA exists precisely because we believe that the talent, innovation and resilience of South Africa's young people constitute one of our country's greatest national assets.

Allow me also to acknowledge our implementing partner, Youth Life, whose work in preparing for this operational launch has ensured that today's programme moves beyond ceremony into implementation. I also wish to thank our local municipality, community organisations, schools, traditional leadership and every stakeholder who has partnered with us to make this initiative possible. Sustainable development is built through partnerships, shared accountability and a collective commitment to improving the lives of our people. No institution succeeds alone, and no community develops in isolation.

As we leave here today, let this not be remembered simply as another Mandela Day event. Let it be remembered as the day on which government returned to honour the trust that young people placed in it. Let it be remembered as the day on which CVs submitted during Phanda Thursday became real opportunities.



Let it be remembered as the day on which the Revitalised National Youth Service moved from concept to implementation. Most importantly, let it be remembered as another step towards building a South Africa in which every young person, regardless of where they live or the circumstances into which they were born, has a fair opportunity to contribute, to participate and to succeed.

That is the South Africa Nelson Mandela envisioned. It is the South Africa that the National Youth Development Agency remains committed to building, one community, one partnership and one opportunity at a time.

I thank you.