



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

**RURAL STRATEGY LAUNCH
NKOMAZI, MPUMALANGA**

14 JULY 2026



SPEAKING NOTES BY THE EXECUTIVE

CHAIRPERSON OF THE NYDA ON THE OCCASION OF THE RURAL STRATEGY

LAUNCH – Keynote Address | ±15 – 30 minutes

14 July 2026

Programme Director;

Executive Mayors;

Members of the NYDA Board;

Chief Executive Officer of the NYDA;

Traditional Leaders;

Representatives of Government;

Our development partners;

Representatives of business, academia and civil society;

Members of the media;

Most importantly, the young people of Nkomazi;

Distinguished guests;

Good morning.

It is a privilege to stand before you in Driekoppies today as we launch the National Youth Development Agency's Rural Youth Development Strategy. I am particularly pleased that we are gathered here in Nkomazi because this launch belongs here.

Driving through this municipality, one is reminded that rural South Africa has never lacked promise. The fertile fields that sustain agriculture, the richness of its cultural heritage, the resilience of its communities and the determination of its people all testify to a region endowed with immense potential. Yet the greatest asset of Nkomazi is not its land. It is not its natural resources. It is the ambition, creativity and resilience of its young people.

When our Constitution committed this nation to dignity, equality and freedom, it established a vision of a South Africa in which every citizen, regardless of circumstance, would enjoy an equal opportunity to realise their full potential. That



promise was never intended to be experienced differently depending on whether one lived in a metropolitan city, a township or a rural village.

Yet we must acknowledge that, for many young people living in communities such as Driekoppies, opportunity continues to be shaped by geography. For too many, the journey towards education is longer. The journey towards employment is harder. The journey towards finance, markets, technology and entrepreneurial support is more uncertain.

The result is that geography has quietly become one of the greatest determinants of economic opportunity in democratic South Africa. This is not because rural communities lack ideas, or because rural young people lack determination. Nor is it because they lack the willingness to work. It is because the systems that create opportunity have historically been concentrated elsewhere.

If we are serious about building an inclusive economy, then we must be equally serious about correcting that imbalance. This launch is important to realise and correct those type of imbalances.

We are gathered because the National Youth Development Agency has taken a deliberate decision to reposition rural youth development from the margins of implementation to the centre of our institutional mandate.

This Strategy recognises that the future of rural South Africa cannot be transformed through isolated projects or once-off interventions. Sustainable development requires coordinated action, measurable implementation and partnerships capable of expanding opportunity into every community where young people live.

That is precisely what this Strategy seeks to achieve. It embeds rural youth development into the NYDA's planning, implementation and accountability systems so that rural inclusion becomes part of how we work every day, not merely what we aspire to achieve.

Its focus is clear. To ensure that young people living in rural communities are able to access the same opportunities for enterprise development, skills training, innovation, digital participation, agricultural development and economic inclusion that should be available to every young South African. Not because rural youth require charity. But because they deserve fairness.

There is another reality that we must confront with equal urgency. The future of economic participation will be increasingly digital. Whether a young person wants to study online, apply for employment, market a business, access government services,



participate in e-commerce, utilise artificial intelligence, or adopt modern agricultural technologies, reliable digital connectivity is no longer optional, it is essential.

In many rural communities, however, access to the digital economy remains constrained by inadequate network coverage and limited broadband infrastructure. This creates a new form of exclusion, where talented young people are prevented from participating in the economy of the future simply because they cannot connect to it.

If we are serious about unlocking rural potential, then digital inclusion must become a national development priority alongside roads, schools, clinics and water infrastructure.

This is why the implementation of this Strategy requires an even broader partnership. It is a call upon our traditional leaders, as custodians of much of the land on which rural communities live and develop, to continue working with government and industry in enabling infrastructure that serves future generations. This Rural Strategy equally calls upon our partners in the telecommunications sector, including Vodacom, MTN, Cell C, Telkom and other network providers, to deepen investment in rural broadband and telecommunications infrastructure.

Every network tower established in a rural community does far more than improve connectivity. It enables a student to participate in digital learning. It allows an entrepreneur to reach new markets. It gives a farmer access to information, innovation and technology. It connects communities to opportunity, and opportunity to communities.

Because in the twenty-first century, digital connectivity is not simply about communication. It is about economic inclusion, social mobility and ensuring that no young South African is excluded from the opportunities of the future because of where they live.

There is an important distinction between equality and equity. Equality assumes that opportunity already exists equally for everyone. Equity recognises that where inequality has been created over generations, deliberate action is required to remove the barriers that continue to disadvantage certain communities.

The Rural Youth Development Strategy is, therefore, not simply an economic intervention. It is an intervention in spatial justice. It recognises that the place where a young person is born should never become the boundary of what that young person is capable of becoming.



Here in Mpumalanga, the NYDA has already supported young entrepreneurs in agriculture, tourism, manufacturing, retail, beauty, logistics and technology. These enterprises have demonstrated that when opportunity reaches rural communities, young people respond not with dependency, but with innovation, entrepreneurship and productivity.

Our responsibility now is to ensure that these examples become commonplace across South Africa. Achieving that objective requires all of us.

Government has a responsibility to create an enabling environment. Municipalities have a responsibility to understand local economic realities. Traditional leaders continue to play an indispensable role in mobilising communities and protecting community assets. Educational institutions must prepare young people for a rapidly changing economy. The private sector must recognise rural South Africa not as a peripheral market but as a place of investment, innovation and enterprise. Civil society remains critical in strengthening participation and accountability.

Above all, young people themselves must remain active participants in shaping the future of their communities. Partnerships are not an administrative convenience. They are the architecture through which meaningful development becomes possible.

Distinguished guests,

South Africa has never suffered from a shortage of policies. Our greatest test has always been implementation. Communities do not measure success by the number of strategies government produces. They measure success by whether government changes the conditions under which they live.

The true measure of this Strategy will therefore not be today's launch. It will be measured by whether more young people establish sustainable businesses. Whether more young people access meaningful employment. Whether innovation begins to flourish in rural communities. Whether agriculture becomes an attractive pathway for the next generation. Whether local economies grow because young people choose to build their futures where they were raised rather than leaving because opportunity never arrived.

That is the standard against which the NYDA willingly asks to be judged. To the young people gathered here today, let me conclude by saying this. This Strategy was not developed because we believe rural youth require saving. It was developed because we believe rural youth are indispensable to South Africa's future.

Your communities possess ideas. They possess leadership. They possess entrepreneurial energy. They possess innovation.



Our responsibility is to ensure that these qualities are matched by access to opportunity. If we succeed in doing that, we will achieve far more than implementing a strategy. We will begin to redefine the geography of opportunity in democratic South Africa.

Many years from now, the significance of today will not be measured by the speeches we delivered, the photographs we took or the document we launched.

The significance of today will be measured by whether a young girl growing up here in Driekoppies believes she can become an entrepreneur, an engineer, a farmer, a scientist or a leader without believing that success requires leaving home.

If that becomes the legacy of the Rural Youth Development Strategy, then history will record that this was not simply the day the National Youth Development Agency launched a new policy.

It was the day we collectively affirmed that where a young South African is born should never determine the size of their future.

I thank you.