



SPEAKING NOTES FOR EXECUTIVE CHAIRPERSON
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YOUTH PARLIAMENT
CONSTITUTIONAL IMPERATIVE: MOVING FROM
THEORY TO PRACTICAL IDEAS
JOHANNESBURG

15 JUNE 2026

**SPEAKING NOTES BY THE EXECUTIVE CHAIRPERSON OF THE NYDA ON THE
OCCASION OF THE YOUTH PARLIAMENT – *Remarks | ±15 minutes***

15 June 2026

*Programme Director,
Honourable Speaker and Presiding Officers,
Honourable Members of Parliament and Members of Provincial Legislatures,
Representatives of Government, Business, Labour and Civil Society,
Distinguished Guests,
Fellow South Africans,
And, above all, the young people whose future demands our collective action.*

Good morning

The Constitution gave South Africa a promise. It promised dignity, equality and freedom to every citizen, regardless of race, geography or circumstance. But the true measure of that promise is not found in the pages of our founding document.

It is found in whether a young woman in Lusikisiki can access funding to grow her business, whether a graduate in Tzaneen can secure meaningful work experience, whether a young innovator in Springbok can compete in the digital economy, and whether a young farmer in Umngungundlovu can build a sustainable enterprise that feeds communities and creates jobs.

That is the constitutional imperative before us: moving from theory to practical ideas. And as we commemorate thirty years of our democratic Constitution and fifty years since the youth of 16 June 1976 stood against injustice, we are reminded that every generation has been called to confront the defining barriers of its time.

The young people of 1976 fought for the right to quality education. Our generation must ensure that education leads to employment, that skills lead to enterprise, and that constitutional rights lead to measurable improvements in people's daily lives.



For the National Youth Development

Agency, this is not an abstract conversation. It is our sole mandate. We exist to ensure that the Constitution is not experienced as a document that young people admire from a distance, but as a living commitment that opens doors to opportunity, innovation and economic participation. This ensures that while the Constitution provides the promise, the NYDA builds the pathways.

Since 2025, the Agency has deliberately repositioned itself as South Africa's principal convener of youth development ecosystems. We have moved beyond the notion that youth development can be achieved through isolated programmes and instead embraced a model that connects government, municipalities, universities, TVET colleges, SETAs, development finance institutions, business and civil society around one common objective: expanding opportunity for young people.

This repositioning recognises a simple truth. If youth development remains the responsibility of one institution, then we have misunderstood the Constitution itself. Every department represented in this House, every municipality, every business and every development partner has a role to play in creating pathways to inclusion.

That philosophy is reflected in our flagship Phanda Thursday initiative. Rather than expecting young people to navigate fragmented systems in search of support, we are taking services, opportunities and strategic partners directly into communities. We are bringing government closer to the people it serves and ensuring that geography does not become destiny. In many respects, Phanda Thursday is the Constitution in action because it places access, dignity and inclusion at the centre of service delivery.

Honourable Members, the programme before us asks how the NYDA has advanced the implementation of the National Youth Service Programme. We have deliberately repositioned National Youth Service from a programme of participation into a programme of progression.

Service should not end with a certificate. It should become a bridge to employability, entrepreneurship and active citizenship. By combining community service with practical experience, leadership development and skills acquisition, National Youth Service enables young people to contribute to nation-building while simultaneously preparing them for sustainable economic participation. This is what moving from theory to practical ideas looks like. It is the Constitution expressed through action rather than aspiration.

The Agency has adopted the same philosophy in driving economic transformation and entrepreneurship. South Africa cannot solve youth unemployment by producing



job seekers alone. We must produce job creators. We must build an economy in which young people are not only employees but innovators, investors and owners of productive assets.

This is why I believe that the next frontier of our democracy is economic citizenship. True citizenship in the twenty-first century is not measured only by the right to vote. It is measured by the ability to participate meaningfully in the economy, to build enterprises, to own assets, to create jobs and to contribute to national prosperity. Everything the NYDA does is aimed at expanding that economic citizenship.

Through entrepreneurship development, grant funding, business support services, mentorship and market linkages, we are strengthening the ecosystem within which young businesses can survive and scale. The recent expansion of the Presidential Youth Employment Initiative, creating an additional 100 000 opportunities, demonstrates what becomes possible when institutions work collaboratively to convert policy into measurable impact. Behind every opportunity is a young South African gaining confidence, experience and a genuine pathway into the labour market.

Yet, the reality is that the economy itself is ever evolving. Artificial intelligence, automation and advanced technologies are reshaping industries at unprecedented speed. The countries that will lead the future will not necessarily be those with the greatest mineral wealth but those with the greatest investment in human capability. South Africa's greatest strategic advantage is not beneath our soil, but within our youthful population.

That is why the NYDA continues to advocate for a National Skills Revolution - one that equips young people with digital capability, entrepreneurial thinking, critical problem-solving and lifelong learning so that they become creators of technology rather than consumers of it.

The same future-focused approach guides our commitment to the green and blue economies. Renewable energy, climate adaptation, sustainable agriculture, aquaculture, maritime industries and ocean sciences represent opportunities that can redefine youth employment in South Africa. Our responsibility is to ensure that young people are not spectators to these transitions but leaders of them.

Equally, we cannot discuss economic participation without confronting digital exclusion. In the digital age, data is no longer simply a commodity; it is the currency of participation. A young person without affordable connectivity is excluded from education, employment, entrepreneurship and innovation before they have even entered the economy. The constitutional commitment to equality therefore demands



that digital inclusion become part of our broader development agenda because access to data has become access to opportunity itself.

Honourable members, through our partnership with YOMO, we are creating accessibility by bridging the connectivity and data struggle faced by young people in our country, particularly in remote areas. YOMO is more than just a SIM card - it is a gateway to opportunity, providing young people with affordable connectivity and zero-rated access to skills development, gig work opportunities, mentorship and digital pathways that can transform their futures. We know that inspiration alone cannot change lives. Access can. Exposure can. Networks can. Partnerships can.

We are also enlightened to express that the work of the NYDA extends beyond South Africa's borders. The African Union Youth Charter reminds us that young people are not passive beneficiaries of development but active agents of transformation, governance and economic progress. The opportunities presented by the African Continental Free Trade Area require us to prepare young entrepreneurs who can compete confidently across Africa while strengthening regional integration and shared prosperity.

In an increasingly complex geopolitical environment, nations are competing not only for markets but for talent, technology and innovation. South Africa must decide whether it will export raw materials and import opportunity or invest in its young people and export ideas, enterprises and leadership to the continent and the world.

The programme also asks how we are addressing financial sector barriers affecting youth entrepreneurship. For too many young people, the greatest obstacle is not a lack of innovation but a financial system that continues to privilege inherited wealth over potential. Brilliant ideas remain unfunded because collateral is valued more highly than creativity.

The NYDA is working to change that reality by championing more inclusive financing models, strengthening investor readiness, supporting enterprise development and advancing catalytic funding mechanisms that connect young entrepreneurs not only to capital but also to markets, mentorship and long-term sustainability. Our objective is not merely to finance businesses, but to further redesign the ecosystem in which youth-owned enterprises operate.

Honourable Members, every committee represented in this House should ask itself one simple question: how does the work before us expand opportunity for young people? Because if we are serious about moving from theory to practical ideas, then



youth development cannot be confined to one institution. It must become the lens through which every policy, every budget and every decision is considered.

The National Youth Development Agency stands ready to continue serving as the constitutional bridge between policy and possibility, between aspiration and implementation, and between the promise of democracy and the lived experience of young South Africans.

Fifty years ago, the youth of 1976 demanded that the doors of learning be opened. Thirty years ago, our Constitution promised dignity, equality and freedom. Our responsibility today is to ensure that those doors lead somewhere - to thriving businesses, meaningful employment, laboratories and innovation hubs, farms and factories, digital platforms and sustainable industries where young South Africans are not merely participants but leaders.

That is the constitutional imperative before us. That is the work of the National Youth Development Agency. And that is how we ensure that freedom lives in every generation - because every generation has been given not only the right to dream, but the opportunity to build.

I thank you.