



SPEAKING NOTES BY THE EXECUTIVE CHAIRPERSON OF THE NATIONAL YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AGENCY (NYDA) ON THE OCCASION OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN YOUTH COUNCIL (SAYC) TRIENNIAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY

25 October 2025

Programme Director,

President of the South African Youth Council, Mr. Siphelele Gavu,

Members of the SAYC National Executive Committee,

Leaders of youth formations,

Comrades and friends in the struggle for development and justice,

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

All protocol observed

Colleagues, it is an honour for me to stand before you today not only as the Executive Chairperson of the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA), but as part of a generation that refuses to be silent.

This Triennial General Assembly (TGA) sits at a critical juncture as dynamics in the global political economy shift, this is a moment that demands clarity of vision, courage of conviction, and unity of purpose.

Across the world, we are witnessing a reconfiguration of power. In the recent past, we've seen the rise of new economic centres, we've seen how BRICS countries, more especially China, India, and Brazil are playing a more significant role in the global economy, leading to increased questioning and challenging of the traditional dominance of Western powers, questioning global governance systems, this coupled with an intensifying struggle for justice, democracy, and inclusion.

The global balance of forces is shifting, and this shift is shaping the destiny of nations like ours. In this context, the youth of South Africa can no longer afford to be bystanders. We must



be the architects, the disruptors, and the innovators who chart a new path, one that reclaims the promise of democracy and builds a more just, inclusive, and equitable nation.

In the same breadth colleagues, South Africa has assumed the Presidency of the G20, a historic opportunity not merely to occupy a seat at the table, but to reshape the global development agenda in the image of Africa's aspirations.

This moment calls upon us as the youth to ensure that the pressing issues of the Global South, from unemployment and inequality to digital exclusion and climate vulnerability, are not treated as marginal footnotes, but as central pillars of global deliberations.

We must insist that Africa's voice is not only heard but heeded. We must remind the world that there can be no sustainable global development without the meaningful inclusion of young people, particularly those from the African continent.

This is precisely why the partnership between the SAYC and the NYDA as most recently demonstrated through the National Youth Consultation is of such historic importance.

Colleagues, this collaboration is not a programme. It is the reawakening of a unified youth front, a strategic alliance between the youth movement and the state, anchored in accountability, participation, and transformative action.

Through the consultation, we affirmed a simple but powerful truth: that young people are not a problem to be solved, but a solution waiting to be unleashed. We sent a clear message that through hard work, solidarity, and shared purpose, no young person, regardless of background or geography, should be left behind in South Africa's developmental journey.

We are no longer content with symbolic representation. We demand structural inclusion in policy formulation, in budget allocation, in programme design, and in the governance frameworks that shape our future.

President and colleagues, I contend at the heart of South Africa's youth development architecture stand two powerful institutions the SAYC and the NYDA, distinct in their mandates, yet inseparable in purpose.



As we all know, SAYC exists to organise, mobilise, and represent the collective voice of young people while transforming that voice into a social and political force capable of influencing national priorities. It unites youth formations from every sector, ensuring that young people are not spectators in their own future, but active participants in shaping the country's developmental path.

The NYDA, on the other hand, is the institutional muscle of youth development that is charged with coordinating, implementing, and monitoring programmes that give substance to that collective voice. It is the space where policy meets practice, where ideals are translated into tangible interventions from entrepreneurship and skills development to national service and social innovation.

In other words, colleagues, when these two institutions, SAYC and the NYDA, work in harmony, the result is not duplication, but synergy; a fusion of movement and machinery, activism and administration, ideology and implementation.

Together, they form a strategic front capable of fundamentally altering the terrain of youth development in South Africa. This alignment, colleagues, is not bureaucratic, it is revolutionary. It represents the meeting point between state power and people's power, between the legitimacy of the youth mandate and the institutional authority to act. When SAYC mobilises and the NYDA institutionalises, we create a feedback loop of action and accountability a model capable of turning policy into practice and protest into progress.

We are out of time colleagues; the reality is that the time has come for the youth sector to move beyond rhetoric into radical coordination. Because when the youth voice and state capacity align, the transformation of our nation is not only possible it but becomes inevitable.

As we reflect on the future of youth development, we must also confront one of the defining challenges and opportunities of our era: the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the rapid transformation of the global digital economy.



AI is already reshaping every sector — from healthcare and education to agriculture, transport, and governance. It is changing how we live, how we work, and how we connect. Yet, if we do not act deliberately, young people in South Africa risk being left behind.

Our fight against unemployment must therefore be forward-looking. It is not enough to respond to yesterday's economy; we must prepare for tomorrow's. This means investing in digital skills, data literacy, coding, cybersecurity, and AI innovation, but also developing young policymakers and regulators who can shape ethical, inclusive, and socially just digital futures.

We need young people who are not just consumers of technology, but creators, coders, and custodians of the digital age. If we fail to respond to the demands of the fourth industrial revolution with urgency and imagination, we risk reproducing inequality in new forms where digital exclusion becomes the new frontier of poverty.

The NYDA and SAYC must therefore play a leading role in building youth capacity for the digital economy, aligning our programmes and advocacy with national and continental strategies such as SA Connect, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), and the AU's Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa.

We must ensure that our response to unemployment aligns with both current and future demands because a nation that does not invest in the digital capabilities of its youth will soon find itself obsolete and unprepared for the world that is fast emerging.

Moreover, we must speak frankly: the crisis of youth unemployment in South Africa remains an indictment on all of us.

But even more alarming is the rise in graduate unemployment. Across our universities and TVET colleges, thousands of young people are doing everything society asked of them, studying, qualifying, and persevering, yet find themselves excluded from the labour market.

This reality exposes a painful contradiction: that education, while necessary, has become insufficient on its own to guarantee dignity and inclusion. It reveals that our economy is not simply short of jobs, but short of absorptive capacity, but further tells us that we need to drive the youth toward skills that are demanded by the market.



Unemployment, colleagues, is a form of systemic exclusion because it removes the youth's access to income, social participation, and a sense of belonging, which can lead to further marginalization. It is a threat to our democracy because we cannot be truly democratic so long as we struggle to overcome unemployment and inequality.

Be that as it may, I contend that this crisis must be understood as a call to radical innovation, not despair. In the NYDA we believe through the National Youth Service, the NPO Incubator, and Youth Entrepreneurship Support Programmes, we are deliberately opening pathways for young people to serve, learn, and lead.

But no institution can succeed in isolation. These initiatives can only achieve their full potential when: Youth formations like the SAYC mobilise and educate communities, the private sector commits to inclusive participation, and government acts with integrity and urgency. Together, we can build an economy that values youth not as dependents, but as drivers of productivity, creativity, and nation-building.

This Assembly's theme, "*Consolidating Our Legacy, Uniting for Impact,*" calls us to reflect deeply on the unfinished business of the youth struggle and to look forward to the possibilities of a rapidly changing world. It further calls on us to consolidate our legacy to ensure that it is one of active citizenship, ethical leadership, and collective mobilisation.

Our impact will not be measured by the speeches we make in conferences or boardrooms, but by how effectively we translate our resolutions into action in townships, rural areas, and institutions where young people seek opportunity and dignity.

Today, I want to urge SAYC to continue to safeguard the independence of the youth voice, while the NYDA must remain the institutional vehicle that turns that voice into measurable development outcomes.

As we shape the next chapter of youth leadership, the voices of women in this generation must come out strongly and unapologetically. This TGA must emerge with women leaders at the forefront because history has shown us that where women lead, societies advance

It has been researched that where gender equality is prioritised, we witness progressive policies, stronger institutions, and communities that are more equitable and humane.



Of equal importance colleagues is that this generation must be one that affirms and protects the rights and dignity of the LGBTQIA+ community. We cannot claim to build a free and democratic South Africa while reproducing the violence, exclusion, and silencing of queer voices.

We must promote a youth culture rooted in love, tolerance, and understanding, where every young person regardless of gender, sexuality, or identity feels safe, valued, and seen.

Lastly, as the NYDA, we reaffirm our commitment to walk this journey with the SAYC, not as parallel entities, but as partners in transformation. Our collaboration must deepen, grounded in trust, transparency, and shared purpose.

Let this TGA be remembered as the moment when South Africa's youth leadership united its voice, renewed its purpose, and reclaimed its rightful place in both national and global development discourse.

Thank you.