

TO ALL MEDIA/ NEWS EDITORS
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NYDA SETS THE RECORD STRAIGHT: UNGA ENGAGEMENT WAS A STRATEGIC INVESTMENT IN YOUTH

The National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) has noted the recent article published by The Sunday World and wishes to set the record straight regarding the agency's strategic engagement at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). The agency refutes any insinuation of impropriety or wasteful expenditure.

The engagement at UNGA in September 2025 was not a junket. It was a strategic investment undertaken at the invitation of the Ministry in the Presidency responsible for Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities. The purpose was to advance South Africa's youth development agenda on a global stage during the 80th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, marking the 30th anniversary of the World Programme of Action for Youth. The NYDA's role in this official South African delegation was to advocate for youth development issues, including international trade, the empowerment of women, and the rights of minority communities.

The return on this investment is concrete and measurable. Through this engagement, the NYDA secured a partnership with IAMTHECODE, facilitated by the Ministry. This collaboration will provide 600,000 young South Africans with free training in Artificial Intelligence, Coding, and Data Sciences. Each training license is valued at \$9 000 each. The NYDA will play a pivotal role as the implementing partner, working alongside the UN Foundation, Unilever, UBS, and others, to reduce the number of young people not in employment, education or training in South Africa. This initiative will build innovation capabilities for youth in future industries and enhance employability through Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics and Design (STEAMD) education. It is an initiative widely recognised by the UN High Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment, UNICEF, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and the World Economic Forum. This single outcome alone delivers value that far surpasses the cost of the delegation's travel and sets a clear trajectory for skills development in the country.

In planning this mission, the agency strictly adhered to its travel policy, which references National Treasury Regulations and cost-containment directives. Several deliberate cost-cutting measures were implemented. For example, the CEO was not

part of the delegation, as one of the decisions taken was specifically to reduce expenditure. The carefully considered team, comprising the Executive Chairperson, Executive Deputy Chairperson and three officials providing essential technical and policy support, was kept to the minimum required for effective representation.

Beyond the IAMTHECODE partnership, South Africa’s youth policy priorities are now embedded in international frameworks that will shape donor investment for years to come. None of this would have been achieved without direct engagement at UNGA. These are not peripheral achievements but concrete deliverables that create pathways for young people that cannot be achieved through domestic programming alone.

Accountability is not only about what is spent, but about what is achieved with that expenditure. The question should not simply be about cost, but about whether the UNGA engagement delivered value that surpasses its cost. The answer is a definitive yes. In partnerships, programmes, policy influence, and pathways for hundreds of thousands of young people who were not in that room but will feel its impact for years to come, that is value for money.

The NYDA’s commitment remains unwavering to create meaningful, lasting change for South Africa’s young people. Every decision taken, every engagement pursued, and every partnership secured is in the service of young people of South Africa. The agency will continue to defend its mandate, to deliver on its promises, and to ensure that young South Africans are not left behind in a rapidly changing world.

The agency calls on media houses to report objectively, as subjective reporting causes reputational damage that undermines public trust in institutions working tirelessly for the benefit of young people. The NYDA remains fully committed to the principles of good governance, accountability, and transparency in all its operations.

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