nyda
NATIONAL YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AGENCY
OUR YOUTH. OUR FUTURE.

SPEAKING NOTES FOR EXECUTIVE CHAIRPERSON
DR SUNSHINE MYENDE

OFFICIAL LAUNCH OF THE MPUMALANGA SKILLS DEVELOPMENT ZONE

MPUMALANGA

29 OCTOBER 2026

SPEAKING NOTES BY THE EXECUTIVE CHAIRPERSON OF THE NYDA ON THE OCCASION OF THE OFFICIAL LAUNCH OF THE MPUMALANGA SKILLS DEVELOPMENT ZONE – *Panel Address | ±30 minutes*

29 October 2026

QUESTION 1: YOUTH ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSION

How can the SDZ be designed around the circumstances of young people in Mpumalanga, especially those outside employment, education and training, so that opportunities are genuinely accessible?

Thank you, Programme Director.

Perhaps our starting point needs to recognise that young people are not a homogeneous group. A young person who has completed a qualification but cannot find workplace experience has different needs from someone who left school early or an aspiring entrepreneur who lacks access to finance and markets.

The urgency is quite clear. In the second quarter of 2026, Mpumalanga's youth unemployment rate stood at 50.2% among those aged 15–34. Nationally, 5 million young people in this age group were unemployed. These figures reinforce the need for interventions that respond to local realities and connect young people to genuine economic opportunities.

I would encourage the SDZ partners to begin with a local youth and skills assessment, working with municipalities, TVET colleges, community organisations and employers to identify who is being excluded, what skills they have and what prevents them from accessing opportunities.

That assessment must inform practical responses, including accessible training, appropriate workplace experience, entrepreneurship support and assistance with barriers such as transport and access to information.

We must also track who participates and
who progresses, with particular attention to young women, queer youth and young persons with disabilities.

The objective is not to solely make training available, but to ensure that young people can access it, complete it and use it to enter the economy.

QUESTION 2: A SUSTAINABLE MODEL FOR YOUTH ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION

What sustainable model could link youth skilling, enterprise incubation, mentorship, finance and market access, with lessons for replication elsewhere?

Thank you for that question, Programme Director.

I would propose that the SDZ partners develop an integrated youth economic participation pathway that connects skills development to either employment or viable enterprise development.

The starting point must be economic demand: identifying the skills employers need and the goods and services that emerging industries may require. Training and enterprise support can then be aligned with those opportunities.

For young people seeking employment, this means connecting relevant training to workplace learning and potential recruitment. For aspiring entrepreneurs, it means combining incubation and mentorship with appropriate finance, business-development support and access to customers.

This is particularly important in the energy transition, where opportunities may extend beyond direct employment in energy companies to supporting services and supply chains. These opportunities must be validated with industry rather than assumed.

The NYDA can explore how its youth entrepreneurship and business-development support can complement this pathway, working with DHET, training institutions, employers and financing partners.

We should measure success through
outcomes: young people gaining workplace experience, entering employment, and establishing businesses that secure customers and sustain their operations.

If the model demonstrates results in Nkangala, we should document its effectiveness, costs and partnerships before adapting it for other communities.

Skills development must connect to economic demand, and enterprise support must connect young people to viable markets.

CROSS-PANEL QUESTION: LEARNING FROM KOMATI AND MIDDELBURG

How can the experiences of Komati and Middelburg inform decisions about which initiatives should be expanded across Mpumalanga?

Komati and Middelburg remind us that a just energy transition must build on the economic strengths of an area while preparing communities for emerging industries.

Middelburg has an established steel and industrial base, while Komati presents opportunities linked to renewable energy, agrivoltaics and microgrid assembly. Nkangala also has potential to explore emerging opportunities in areas such as industrial hemp, sustainable aviation fuel and business services.

The question is how we ensure that young people are equipped to participate in these opportunities, rather than watching investment come into their communities without benefiting from it.

This is where the NYDA has a role to play. Working with the Skills Development Zone, TVET colleges, employers and other partners, the NYDA can help connect young entrepreneurs to business development support, mentorship and available funding opportunities. We can also work with industry partners to identify opportunities for youth-owned businesses within supply chains, procurement and local enterprise development.

This must be intentional about including young women, queer youth, persons with disabilities and young people who are outside employment, education or training.

Ultimately, we must measure success by
how many young people access employment, establish sustainable businesses and participate meaningfully in the local economy.

COMMON CLOSING QUESTION: THE FIRST-YEAR PRIORITY

What one action in the first year would make the SDZ a meaningful opportunity for improved livelihoods and economic participation in affected communities?

My priority would be to establish a coordinated youth economic participation pathway for Nkangala, supported by a local baseline assessment and measurable outcomes.

We need to identify the young people who require support, understand their barriers, map relevant economic opportunities and connect them to appropriate training, workplace experience or enterprise development.

We should then track their progression into employment or business activity, so that participating institutions can identify what is working and where additional support is needed.

The NYDA can explore how it can contribute through its youth-development and entrepreneurship support, in collaboration with the relevant partners.

In the first year, we must move from identifying opportunities to demonstrating that young people can access them and translate them into improved livelihoods.

Thank you.