



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

**SIHLE HIGH SCHOOL GREENING PROJECT
SIHLE HIGH SCHOOL, KZN**

27 OCTOBER 2026

**SPEAKING NOTES BY THE EXECUTIVE
CHAIRPERSON OF THE NYDA ON THE OCCASION OF THE SIHLE HIGH
SCHOOL GREENING PROJECT – Keynote Address | ±10 minutes**

27 October 2026

*Programme Director,
The Principal and educators,
Representatives of Umdoni Municipality,
The NYDA team,
And the learners of Sihle High School.*

Good morning, everyone.

It is a pleasure to be back at Sihle High School.

I once walked these grounds as a learner many moons ago, just as you do today. Returning here gives me an opportunity to give something back to a school that forms part of my own journey. But it also gives me an opportunity to speak to you about the possibilities that lie ahead of you, some of which you may not yet have imagined.

Today, we are here to plant and nurture something. And while we are focusing on a greening project, I hope that what we begin here will grow into something much bigger than a garden.

I hope we are planting the seeds of knowledge, opportunity and a generation of young people who will find solutions to the challenges facing their communities.

Let's consider something we encounter every day - ukudla. We eat it, we share it with our families, and for many of us, it is part of our daily routine. But how often do we stop to consider where it comes from, what it takes to produce it and why access to nutritious food matters?

Food is essential to our health, concentration and ability to learn. South Africa's National School Nutrition Programme recognises this connection by providing meals to millions of learners. School food gardens can complement these efforts by helping learners understand food production and, where properly maintained, providing fresh produce to supplement meals.



This matters because food security is not simply about producing food. It is also about whether people can access nutritious food consistently and whether communities have the knowledge and resources to sustain its production.

Our own municipality offers a reason to take this seriously. Research into community gardens in Umdoni has documented food insecurity among the households studied and challenges that can limit how much food gardens produce. The lesson is that growing food requires knowledge, planning, resources and sustained commitment.

And that is precisely why this project presents such a valuable learning opportunity. A garden can become a practical classroom. It can help you understand soil, water, plant growth, nutrition and the relationship between people and the environment. It can teach you to observe problems, ask questions, test ideas and work together to find solutions.

Today, we will also be leaving the school and its learners with books on Agricultural Management Practices and other learning resources. I encourage you to make full use of them. A garden gives you the opportunity to learn through practice, while these books can help you understand the knowledge behind what you do.

Perhaps, among the learners here today, there is a future farmer who will help feed communities. Perhaps there is a food scientist who will develop better ways to preserve food and reduce waste. Perhaps there is an agricultural specialist who will help farmers respond to changing environmental conditions. Or perhaps there is an entrepreneur who will build a successful business by turning agricultural knowledge into economic opportunity. These are skills that extend well beyond gardening or greening projects.

You may not know it yet. That is why exposure matters. Sometimes, discovering what you are capable of begins with being given the opportunity to try something you have never done before. My hope is that this garden will spark that curiosity.

I hope that some of you will pursue careers in agriculture, food science, environmental management and related fields. And I hope that, years from now, we will see former Sihle High School learners returning as professionals, innovators and entrepreneurs, sharing their knowledge with this school, neighbouring schools and families in the community.

That is how knowledge can multiply its impact. One opportunity can inspire a learner; that learner can acquire skills; and those skills can eventually benefit an entire community.



As the National Youth Development Agency, we believe that young people must be equipped not only to pursue opportunities for themselves, but also to contribute to the development of their communities. This is an important principle of the National Youth Service - young people can develop practical skills, learn the value of serving and use their abilities to make a meaningful difference in the lives of others.

That principle begins long before a young person enters the workplace. It begins when you take responsibility for your school, share what you know with others and recognise that the skills you develop today can help solve challenges in your community tomorrow.

But we must remember that planting a garden is only the beginning. A garden needs water, care, planning and people who are willing to maintain it. Its success will not be measured only by what we plant today, but by what continues to grow in the months ahead.

I therefore encourage you to take ownership of this initiative. Learn from it. Be curious. Understand what grows well in your environment and how to use resources responsibly. Consider how the knowledge you gain here can be shared with your families and put to use beyond the school grounds.

To the school leadership and practitioners, I encourage you to nurture this project as a continuing learning opportunity, so that learners can see the connection between what they study and the challenges they can help solve in the real world. So that years from now, it is known as a legacy project everyone can tell a story about.

And to the learners, remember that you do not have to wait until you graduate to begin making a difference. You can start by learning, participating, taking responsibility and making the most of the opportunities available to you.

Returning to Sihle High School reminds me that our journeys have beginnings, but they need not end where they started. The places that shape us can also become the places to which we return with new knowledge, new skills and something meaningful to contribute.

Let us make this garden more than a place where vegetables grow. Let it be a place where curiosity is encouraged, skills are developed and future problem-solvers begin to discover what they can contribute to the world.

Thank you for welcoming me back. It is a privilege to contribute to the school that forms part of my story, and I look forward to seeing what we grow together.



I thank you.