



small business  
development  
Department:  
Small Business Development  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



**Keynote Address by the Minister of Small Business Development, Ms Stella  
Tembisa Ndabeni  
Youth Day Commemoration and Launch of the Peo Pele Youth Fund  
Phuthaditjhaba  
27 June 2026**

Programme Director

Premier of the Free State, Ms MaQueen Joyce Letsoha-Mathae

MEC for Economic Development, Small Business Development, Tourism and  
Environmental Affairs, Mr Moses Ketso Makume

Chairperson of the House of Traditional and Khoi-San Leaders;

Executive Mayor of the Thabo Mofutsanyana District Municipality, Councillor Connie  
Msibi

Mayor of Maluti-a-Phofung Local Municipality, Councillor Tumelo Thebe

Mayors and representatives of the Dihlabeng, Nketoana, Setsoto and Phumelela Local  
Municipalities

Interim Chairperson, Board Members, Acting CEO and Executives from SEDFA

Executive Chairperson of the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA)

Acting Director-General of the DSBD, Mr Vuyisa Dayile and DDGs present

Acting Head of Department of the Free State Department of Economic Development,  
Small Business Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs (DESTEA) and other  
Heads of Department from the Free State Provincial Government

Members of the Board and Executive Management of the Free State Development  
Corporation and other provincial public entities

Representatives of provincial and local government

Representatives of youth business formations and entrepreneurship organisations

Members of the Media

Distinguished guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

**Ke qala ka ho dumedisa batjha bohle ba Thabo Mofutsanyana ba teng mona  
kajeno. Re motlotlo ho ba le lona, mme re leboha hore le arabetse pitso ya  
bokamoso ba lona.**

It is a privilege to join the young people of Thabo Mofutsanyana as we commemorate  
Youth Month and launch a programme that invests in South Africa's future.

Fifty years ago, young South Africans changed the course of our nation's history. They stood against injustice with courage, conviction and an unwavering belief that South Africa could become a better country.

Today, we honour their sacrifice not only by remembering their struggle, but by continuing their work.

The generation of 1976 fought for political freedom.  
Our generation must secure economic freedom.

That is why it is fitting that we gather here in the historic Thabo Mofutsanyana District, named after one of the great leaders of our liberation struggle, to launch a programme dedicated to expanding economic opportunities for young South Africans.

This year carries special significance as we commemorate **50 years since the Soweto Uprising, 70 years since the Women's March, and 30 years since the adoption of our Constitution**. These milestones remind us that freedom is never the achievement of one generation alone. Every generation has a responsibility to build on the sacrifices of those who came before it.

For today's young people, that responsibility is to build businesses, create jobs, strengthen communities and contribute to South Africa's economic growth.

The greatest tribute we can pay to the heroes of 1976 is not found in speeches. It is found in action.

It is found in participating in our democracy, contributing to our communities and creating opportunities for others through entrepreneurship.



As we prepare for the Local Government Elections later this year, I encourage every eligible young person to participate actively in our democracy. Your vote shapes your community. Your enterprise shapes our economy. Both matter.

Programme Director,

One of the greatest challenges confronting South Africa remains youth unemployment.

Across our country are young people with innovative ideas, marketable skills and entrepreneurial ambition. Yet too many remain excluded because they cannot access finance, business support, markets or the networks needed to grow successful enterprises.

That is why entrepreneurship remains central to government's economic development agenda.

To make government support easier to access, we established the Small Enterprise Development and Finance Agency (SEDFA) by bringing together Seda, sefa and the Cooperative Banks Development Agency into a single institution.

Entrepreneurs now have one entry point for business development support, finance, market access and enterprise growth. Instead of navigating multiple institutions, they receive integrated support throughout their entrepreneurial journey.

At the same time, we continue working across government to reduce unnecessary red tape, improve the ease of doing business and strengthen partnerships with municipalities, development finance institutions, the private sector and entrepreneurship organisations to create a more enabling environment for small businesses.



small business  
development

Department:  
Small Business Development  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



Programme Director,

Our commitment to inclusive economic growth is reflected in the programmes we continue to implement.

Last month, we launched **Imbali for Her**, a dedicated programme expanding access to finance and business development support for women entrepreneurs.

We have introduced the **Construction Fund**, creating opportunities for emerging contractors to participate meaningfully in the construction sector.

Through the **Township and Rural Entrepreneurship Programme**, we continue to support businesses operating where economic opportunities have historically been limited.

Together, these programmes are ensuring that opportunity reaches every province, every district, every township and every village.

Our vision is ambitious, but it is achievable.

By 2030, SEDFA aims to support one million enterprises and enable or sustain 1.8 million jobs, with 45 per cent of supported enterprises being women-owned, 30 per cent youth-owned and 2 per cent owned by persons with disabilities.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today we launch the **Peo Pele Youth Fund**.

The name *Peo Pele* is deeply symbolic.

Every successful business begins as a seed - a simple idea, a dream, a vision.

Given the right support, that seed grows into a thriving enterprise that creates jobs, transforms families, strengthens communities and contributes to our nation's prosperity.

The Peo Pele Youth Fund builds on the important foundation laid by the Youth Challenge Fund, which demonstrated that young South Africans have the ideas, the talent and the ambition to build successful businesses when given the opportunity.

Since its launch in 2021, the Youth Challenge Fund received 4,828 applications from across the country. From these, 121 enterprises were approved for funding amounting to R362.5 million, with R224.6 million already disbursed to 83 youth-owned enterprises. Importantly, 25 women-owned enterprises received R57 million, while 60 per cent of approved funding supported businesses operating in township and rural communities.

These achievements also highlighted an important lesson that funding alone is not enough. Entrepreneurs require business development support, mentorship, market access and technical assistance at every stage of their journey.

That is why the Peo Pele Youth Fund combines access to finance with integrated business support, recognising that every entrepreneur starts from a different point.

Some have an idea that must be developed.

Others have a business that must be strengthened.

Some require markets before finance.

Others require capital to expand.

The Fund has been designed to meet entrepreneurs where they are.

Programme Director,

Allow me to outline what this means for the young entrepreneurs gathered here today.

Over the next three years, government will invest approximately R900 million into the fund, with it envisaged to close at R300 million this year.

Through this investment, approximately 750 youth-owned enterprises are expected to benefit.

The programme is also expected to create and sustain around 1,500 jobs.

The Peo Pele Youth Fund offers concessionary finance at an interest rate of Prime less 2 per cent, making funding more affordable for young businesses.

In terms of non-financial support, training will be provided through various programmes, with funds set aside to hand hold young entrepreneurs on their respective growth paths.

Recognising that new enterprises require time to establish themselves, successful applicants may also qualify for a capital repayment moratorium of up to twelve months, allowing them to focus on growing their businesses before repayments commence.

The Fund is ring-fenced exclusively for youth-owned enterprises, ensuring dedicated investment in the next generation of entrepreneurs.

Young men and young women will access the Fund on an equal basis, while the dedicated Imbali for Her Fund continues to provide specialised support for women entrepreneurs.



To promote greater inclusion, an even more concessionary interest rate will be applied for young disabled entrepreneurs.

Applications for the Fund have opened today and will remain open for two months.

Following the closure of applications, a comprehensive assessment process will be undertaken, with applicants able to expect outcomes approximately four months after the application window closes.

The Fund will prioritise businesses operating in high-growth sunrise sectors, including digital technologies, the green economy, agri-tech, advanced manufacturing, health and biotechnology, the creative industries, the blue economy and the circular economy.

These sectors will shape South Africa's future economy, drive innovation and create sustainable employment opportunities for generations to come.

The Fund will also be implemented in partnership with organisations such as the National Youth Development Agency, the Technology Innovation Agency, universities, incubators and other ecosystem partners to ensure that young entrepreneurs receive the integrated support they need to succeed.

Young people,

Government can create opportunities, provide finance, build partnerships and remove barriers... But government cannot dream your dream for you.

Only you can do that.

No fund can replace determination.

No loan can replace discipline.



No programme can replace hard work.

Every successful South African business started somewhere.

Some began in garages.

Some around kitchen tables.

Some under trees.

What distinguished them was not where they started, but the determination of those who refused to give up.

The next great South African manufacturer could be sitting in this audience today.

The next exporter.

The next technology innovator.

The next agricultural entrepreneur.

The next employer of hundreds of young people.

As applications open today, I encourage every eligible young entrepreneur to seize this opportunity. Prepare your business, apply, build with integrity, create jobs, contribute to your community, and become part of South Africa's economic future.

The generation of 1976 fought for political freedom. The generation of 2026 must build economic freedom. Peo Pele reminds us that every harvest begins with a seed. Today, we plant that seed together. The future of South Africa is in your hands. Go out and grow it.

I thank you.