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

SEDFA
SMALL ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT AND FINANCE AGENCY

Keynote Address: Launch of the AB4IR Digital Hub and Worldwide Women in Innovation, Incubation and Technology Summit (W-WIITS)

by Minister Stella Tembisa Ndabeni

27 August 2026

Programme Director,

Leadership of Tshwane South TVET College,

College Council Members present

SEDFA Board led by the Interim Chairperson, Mr Patrick Makape

AB4IR Board and Chairperson

Director General of the Department of Small Business Development and DDGs

SEDFA Executive led by the CEO Mr Nkosikhona Mbatha

Africa Beyond 4IR Centre Management led by the CEO Ms Ingrid Mhlophe

Women entrepreneurs and innovators,

Members of the private sector, academia and the technology community,

Members of the Media

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to join you at the Worldwide Women in Innovation, Incubation and Technology Summit.

This platform speaks directly to one of the priorities of our government: ensuring that women are not only participants in the economy, but active drivers of innovation, technology, entrepreneurship and economic transformation.

Today is particularly significant because we are also officially launching the AB4IR Digital Innovation, Technology and Incubation Hub at ODI Campus of the Tshwane South TVET College

This is an important investment in practical opportunities for young people and women in particular to develop ideas, build enterprises and participate meaningfully in the digital and innovation economy.

It demonstrates what is possible when we bring together government, education institutions, industry and entrepreneurship support organisations around a common purpose.

Women and the Innovation Economy

Ladies and gentlemen,

As South Africa seeks to build a more inclusive, productive and globally competitive economy, we must deliberately create pathways for women to participate in sectors that have traditionally been dominated by men.

This includes science, technology, engineering, renewable energy, digital innovation and other technology-intensive industries.

We cannot speak about transformation while women remain underrepresented in the very sectors that are shaping the future of our economy.

Women must have access not only to opportunities, but also to the skills, technology, networks, markets and capital required to turn ideas into viable and sustainable businesses.

This is why incubation and enterprise development are so important.

We need to build a significant pipeline of investment-ready entrepreneurs who can progress from ideation and incubation, to commercialisation, growth and expansion.

The objective must be to ensure that an innovative idea does not remain an idea simply because its creator could not access the right support at the right time.

SEDFA: Beyond Finance

The Small Enterprise Development and Finance Agency, SEDFA, has an important role to play in building this ecosystem.

SEDFA brings together development finance and enterprise development support, providing both financial and non-financial assistance to MSMEs and cooperatives.

Our approach recognises a simple reality: finance alone is not enough.

Entrepreneurs require business development support, mentorship and coaching, skills development, and market access support.

SEDFA therefore supports enterprises across the business lifecycle — from pre-investment and investment readiness, through financing, to post-investment support and business growth.

Women's economic empowerment is a cross-cutting priority across these interventions.

We are developing tailored solutions for priority groups, including women, youth and persons with disabilities, while strengthening participation in township and rural economies.

Imbali For Her: Capital with Purpose

A key example of this commitment is **Imbali for Her**, our dedicated women's enterprise development facility.

Launched on 15 May 2026, Imbali for Her represents an investment of R897 million over three years to support women-owned enterprises across South Africa.

The programme is expected to support approximately 975 women-owned enterprises, with R300 million committed for the 2026/27 financial year.

But this programme is about more than increasing the number of women who receive funding.

It is about creating the conditions for women to establish, grow and sustain enterprises — including businesses operating in sectors where women have historically been underrepresented.

Our objective is to build sustainable and resilient enterprises, strengthen township and rural economies, create employment and increase the participation of women in the mainstream economy.

This is what we mean when we speak about capital with purpose.

Building the Pipeline: Incubation, Finance and Markets

The launch of the AB4IR Digital Innovation, Technology and Incubation Hub provides us with an opportunity to strengthen this pipeline.

We want women and young people to see themselves not only as consumers and users of technology, but as **creators, innovators, technology entrepreneurs and employers**.

Our incubation programme is therefore a critical component of the entrepreneurship value chain.

For the 2026/27 financial year, a total of R123.25 million has been approved for the incubation network to support enterprise development. As part of this broader commitment to innovation and incubation, the total investment committed to Africa Beyond 4IR (AB4IR) to date amounts to R27.6 million.

We are also seeing tangible action in supporting women-owned businesses.

In the first quarter of this financial year, R136 million was disbursed to 1,886 women-owned enterprises.

During the same quarter, 7 897 women-owned businesses received enterprise development support and business diagnostic assessments, including 1 704 businesses in township and rural communities.

These figures demonstrate that our approach is not only about providing finance. It is about building capability, strengthening enterprises and ensuring that economic opportunities reach communities that have historically been excluded from the mainstream economy.

Partnerships to Close the Funding Gap

But government cannot do this alone.

The funding gap facing MSMEs is simply too large for government and SEDFA to fill on their own.

We therefore need stronger and more deliberate partnerships between government, financial institutions, industry, academia, technology companies, incubators, accelerators and the broader private sector.

Through the Department of Small Business Development, we are working on policy adjustments, including through the MSME and Co=operatives Funding Policy, to create an environment that can better respond to the financing needs of small businesses.

SEDFA, in turn, has set a target of raising approximately R11 billion through ecosystem partnerships and supporting 1 million small enterprises financially and non-financiallyby 2030.

This is important because sustainable enterprise development requires us to mobilise resources beyond the public purse.

But our partnerships must go beyond funding.

We need industry partners to share knowledge and expertise with MSMEs, open market opportunities, facilitate technology transfer and help enterprises integrate into value chains.

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An entrepreneur who receives funding but cannot access markets will struggle to build a sustainable business.

An entrepreneur who has a good product but lacks technology or technical skills will also struggle to compete.

Our responsibility, therefore, is to build an ecosystem in which entrepreneurs can access the full range of support required to succeed.

A Call to Action

Distinguished guests,

The AB4IR Digital Innovation, Technology and Incubation Hub represents more than a physical space.

It represents a pathway to opportunity.

It should be a place where ideas are validated, skills are sharpened, niche and opportunity-driven enterprises are incubated, networks are formed, and market-ready innovative solutions are taken to market.

Most importantly, it should help us build a new generation of women innovators and entrepreneurs who are confident enough to enter technology-intensive industries and compete with their global peers.

Let us therefore work towards an ecosystem where every woman with an idea has a pathway to incubation; every viable enterprise has a pathway to finance; and every growing business has a pathway to markets, investment and sustainable growth.

Our responsibility is to ensure that women have the capital, capabilities, technology, markets and opportunities required to realise their full potential.

If we get this right, we will not simply create more women-owned businesses.

We will create innovators, employers, exporters, technology leaders and wealth creators.

I thank you.