

Youth must be the at centre of economic transformation

Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa says South Africa's youth must be placed at the centre of economic transformation, which is the focus of the new term of government.



Ramaphosa says at least 60% of jobs in new infrastructure projects have been set aside for young people. (Image: [HelenOnline](#), via Wikimedia Commons)

"... Economic transformation must and will take centre stage during this new term of government. Youth must be at the centre of that economic transformation," said Ramaphosa, addressing hundreds of people gathered at Galeshewe Stadium in Kimberley for the National Youth Day event on Monday.

Government entered into a new term of office following the general elections and inauguration of a new President. In his Inaugural speech, President Jacob Zuma said the next five years would see the implementation of radical socio-economic transformation policies and programmes.

Jacob Zuma is expected to outline the Programme of Action for the new administration today during his State of the Nation Address.

On National Youth Day, Ramaphosa insisted that if the country can effectively address youth unemployment, not only will it lift millions of South Africans out of poverty, but it will also place the economy on a trajectory of sustainable, inclusive growth.

This year's Youth Day, which commemorates the 1976 Soweto Uprisings, is being held under the theme: "Youth Moving South Africa Forward".

He noted that even though youth economic participation has improved in absolute terms since 1994, and while over the last 20 years government has created many opportunities, the youth still face immense challenges.

There is a need to focus on special measures to ensure that South Africa's youth have access to training, work experience, jobs, and entrepreneurial opportunities.

Progress is claimed to have been made in a number of areas.

"Nearly half of the six million work opportunities created through public works and community work programmes were for young people. In the last five years, R2.7bn has been set aside for youth entrepreneurship finance and support. The amount of student bursaries has doubled," Ramaphosa highlighted.

He stressed the need to do more, saying sharper focus, better implementation, and greater urgency were required.

"One of the most important factors contributing to youth unemployment is the relatively low levels of skills among young people. This is perhaps the most devastating aspect of our apartheid inheritance.

"We need to improve the prospects for today's youth, we need to develop the skills that the country needs now," he said.

Ramaphosa announced that the intake of students for post-school education will be massively expanded over the next five years, with the aim of enrolling the majority of youth aged 18 to 23.

"Government will direct contractors to help increase the number of engineers and artisans, project managers, machine operators and financial managers. State-owned enterprises will need to increase the number of training opportunities offered to young South Africans.

"Part of this effort includes the establishment of two new universities in Mpumalanga and here in Northern Cape. We expect that the Sol Plaatje University will have a profound impact, ensuring that skills, knowledge, and talent are retained in this province."

Government is also proceeding with the implementation of the youth employment incentive scheme, which aims to lower the cost and risk for firms to take on new entrants.

Ramaphosa said government would continue to monitor its implementation to ensure that it does not result in the displacement of other workers.

A major driver of economic growth over the next five years and beyond, he said, is government's investment in infrastructure development.

"Over the last five years, we have invested R1trn in infrastructure. Over the next five years, we expect to invest even more. This programme has benefits that stretch across the economy. It is creating jobs, developing skills and stimulating manufacturing."

He said at least 60% of jobs in new infrastructure projects have been set aside for young people. "This will be combined with improved training by FET colleges to ensure that there are enough young people with the necessary skills."

Ramaphosa added that youth unemployment must be on the agenda of every government department, every state agency, every corporate and every institution of learning.