

2025

Civil Society Organisations Conference Report

Positioning the NDA as a thought leader in poverty eradication and amplifying the role of Civil Society Organisations as drivers of sustainable community development



Report Title Page

Positioning the NDA as a Thought Leader in Poverty Eradication and Amplifying the Role of Civil Society Organisations as Drivers of Sustainable Community Development

Civil Society Organisations Conference Report
8–9 May 2025 | Johannesburg, South Africa

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FOREWORD

It is with honour and sincere appreciation that I present this report on the Civil Society Organisation Conference held on 8-9 May 2025 in Johannesburg. This transformative event reaffirmed our collective commitment to eradicating poverty and advancing sustainable community development across South Africa.

The conference convened a rich and diverse assembly of stakeholders from government, civil society, private sector representatives, academia, and international development partners. Their active participation enriched the dialogue and contributed to a shared vision for strengthened collaboration going forward.

A defining moment of the conference was the inspiring "Voices from the Ground" session, where the NDA-supported CSOs shared powerful testimonials and showcased the transformative impact of their work in all nine provinces. These stories not only reflected the depth of community-based efforts but also underscored the catalytic role of an effectively supported civil society sector.

The actionable recommendations emerging from the commissions provided a strategic path forward. These include the establishment of an NDA-CSO Advisory Committee, the enhancement of our grant-making processes, the strengthening of strategic partnerships, and the support of community-owned enterprises. Together, these initiatives embody our commitment to inclusive development and sustained community empowerment.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to Minister Nokuzola Tolashe, Deputy Minister Ganief Hendricks, Director-General of Social Development, Mr. Netshipale, MEC for Social Development in KZN, Ms. Nonhlanhla Khoza, Chairperson of the NDA Board, Ms. Ruth Bhengu, Programme Director and NDA Board Member, Mr. Josopu, as well as Members of the Portfolio Committee on Social Development, Rev Nhlanhla Gcwabaza, and Ms Nokwethemba Mtshweni, the Presidency, and representatives from the Nedlac Community Constituency.

I also wish to thank our partners from UNDP South Africa, ABSA Bank, the University of Johannesburg, the Young Entrepreneurship Institute, and SEDFA for their unwavering support. Most importantly, I commend all delegates and contributors whose dedication ensured the success of this important gathering.



Mr Thabani Buthelezi
Acting CEO - NDA

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**Let us harness
the momentum
generated by this
conference as we
advance toward a
poverty-free
South Africa,
powered by
active, capable,
and empowered
communities.**





REPORT PRODUCTION

This report was authored and compiled by Dr Nthabiseng Kraai, capturing the depth, nuance, and strategic outcomes of the Civil Society Organisation Ministerial Conference held on 8–9 May 2025. Drawing on the voices of stakeholders, grassroots testimonials, and key policy discussions, the report documents the critical milestones reached during the conference.

It is anchored by a Foreword from the NDA's Acting CEO, Mr Thabani Buthelezi, and reflects the NDA's renewed commitment to positioning Civil Society Organisations as central partners in the fight against poverty. The report also serves as an implementation roadmap, translating dialogue into clear actions for development policy, partnerships, and community empowerment.



Dr Nthabiseng Kraai

Acting Senior Manager - Research
National Development Agency

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This report represents the power of dialogue to build bridges, from testimonials to strategy, from community needs to institutional response



1. Executive Summary

The Civil Society Organisation (CSO) Ministerial Conference was held on 8–9 May 2025 at the ANEW Hotel & Conference Centre in Johannesburg, bringing together government leaders, Civil society Organisations, Academia, the Private Sector, and development partners to strengthen collaboration in the fight against poverty. The two-day conference, themed **“Positioning the NDA as a Thought Leader in Poverty Eradication and Amplifying the Role of CSOs as Drivers of Sustainable Community Development”**, provided a platform for high-level policy addresses, grassroots testimonials, and focused commission breakaways to formulate solutions.

Day 1: The conference opened with formal remarks from the NDA leadership emphasising the historical and future role of civil society in eradicating poverty. The NDA’s Acting CEO outlined the context and objectives, unveiling a reinvigorated strategy for the Agency and calling for bold, collective action. This was followed by a series of plenary presentations by sector leaders, who highlighted community participation in development, the urgency of impactful interventions, and an overview of the CSO landscape in South Africa. A highlight of Day 1 was the “Voices from the Ground” session, where nine representatives of NDA-supported CSOs from nine Provinces shared personal testimonials of their work and its impact. These grassroots voices underscored successes and challenges in areas ranging from cooperative enterprises to youth empowerment. The Minister of Social Development delivered a keynote address outlining the government’s policy agenda for poverty eradication and reaffirming commitment to partnering with CSOs. The day concluded with an interactive plenary discussion, allowing delegates to reflect on insights from the presentations and raise issues for further deliberation.

Programme Directors

Ms Masechaba Mposwa
(TV & Radio Broadcaster)

Mr Thembinkosi Josopu
(NDA Board Member)



Day 2: The second day began with a recap of Day 1 and a briefing on the national Anti-Poverty Strategy by a representative from The Presidency, linking conference dialogues to broader government efforts. Delegates then heard reports from four thematic commissions that had convened in breakaway sessions on Day 1, covering: (1) maximising the impact of NDA grants, (2) innovative partnerships and resource mobilisation, (3) CSO feedback and accountability mechanisms, and (4) community-owned enterprises for sustainable development. Each commission's rapporteur presented key findings and recommendations, which were discussed in an open plenary. The commissions proposed actionable measures such as improving funding processes, strengthening multi-sector partnerships, enhancing accountability between the NDA and CSOs, and promoting social enterprises at the community level. Development stakeholders, including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP-SA), the private sector (ABSA bank), academia (University of Johannesburg), and South African government agency that supports the growth and development of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) and cooperatives (SEDFA), delivered messages of support, each echoing the importance of collaborative action and offering partnership to implement the conference outcomes.

In the closing session, the Deputy Minister of Social Development affirmed the government's dedication to the conference's objectives and formally declared the conference closed. A vote of thanks delivered by the NDA Board's Deputy Chairperson highlighted the NDA's commitment to carry forward the conference resolutions and to integrate the recommendations into its programs and policy advocacy. Key outcomes of the conference included a shared resolve to institutionalise CSO-government partnerships in poverty eradication initiatives, concrete recommendations for improving NDA's support to the sector, and a mandate for the NDA to drive the "turnaround strategy" that aligns with the needs voiced by civil society. The conference concluded with clear future actions, including the development of an implementation plan for the recommendations, continued dialogue with stakeholders, and strengthened accountability to ensure that the momentum gained is translated into measurable progress in poverty reduction efforts.

Civil Society Organisations in attendance, demonstrating a unified commitment to addressing poverty and advancing inclusive community development



Welcome and Opening Remarks



MS RUTH BHENGU

NDA BOARD CHAIRPERSON

The conference opened with a formal Welcome and Opening Remarks by Ms. Ruth Bhengu, Chairperson of the NDA Board Speaking as a veteran civil society activist and leader, Ms. Bhengu acknowledged the presence of the Minister, Deputy Minister, and all delegates, and emphasised the critical role of civil society organisations in South Africa's development. She noted that the NDA was originally established as a product of civil society advocacy, a legacy of partnerships formed to eradicate poverty.

In her remarks, the Chairperson paid tribute to CSOs as the “unsung heroes” working on the frontlines, often filling gaps where government services do not reach. She reminded attendees that civil society's contributions in areas such as education, social welfare, and the liberation struggle long predate the modern government, underlining that community-based initiatives are foundational to social development. Ms. Bhengu welcomed participants to the two-day forum, stressing that the gathering should galvanise collective commitment toward the conference theme of positioning the NDA and CSOs at the forefront of poverty eradication.

**"Community-based
initiatives are
foundational to social
development"**



Conference Context and Purpose



MR THABANI BUTHELEZI

ACTING CEO - NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

Mr. Thabani Buthelezi, the Acting CEO of the NDA, delivered a scene-setting presentation on the Context and Purpose of the Conference, outlining its theme and objectives. Mr. Buthelezi highlighted that the conference was convened at the initiative of the Minister of Social Development, who, upon taking office, recognised the need to reassess and reinvigorate the NDA's engagement with civil society. He described the gathering as a strategic turning point for the Agency, marking the launch of a "bold, redefined purpose" and strategy for the NDA. He explained that the strategy aims to transform the NDA from a routine grant-maker into a proactive thought leader and catalyst in the fight against poverty.

Mr. Buthelezi reviewed the NDA's introspection process over recent months, noting that the Agency had critically examined its capacity and agility to lead on development issues. This introspection has been uncomfortable but necessary, leading to internal reforms and a commitment to improve. For instance, he shared that NDA leadership has been visiting community projects across provinces to gain first-hand insight into the impact of NDA-funded initiatives. These site visits revealed encouraging stories of small community Organisations growing into micro-enterprises and cooperatives, reinforcing the message that with the right support, grassroots initiatives can become self-sustaining enterprises that drive local development.

"CSOs must challenge us, work with us, and advise us"

Mr. Buthelezi also announced several new NDA programmes designed to amplify impact. Among them, he mentioned:

- A "Lead for Change" CSO capacity-building programme aimed at positioning community leaders and organisations at the heart of local development initiatives
- A Digital and Employability Skills Drive to address critical skills gaps among youth in disadvantaged communities, aligning with the increasingly digitised environment.

In conclusion, the Acting CEO issued an open call to all stakeholders that the NDA cannot eradicate poverty alone. He urged government departments, donors, and the private sector to support the implementation of the NDA's new strategy not just in words but with resources and concrete action. He pledged that the NDA would strive to live up to these promises and serve the people of South Africa with renewed purpose, partnership, and measurable impact. Mr. Buthelezi's rousing conclusion, **"together we can turn the tide"**, drew enthusiastic applause and set an optimistic tone for the discussions to follow.

Role of CSOs in Poverty Eradication (NEDLAC Community Constituency)



MR. NHLANHLA NDLOVU CEO - NEDLAC COMMUNITY TRUST

Speaking from the civil society perspective, Mr Ndlovu noted the long-standing partnership between NEDLAC-affiliated CSOs and the NDA, recalling that his own earliest engagement with the NDA dated back to the year 2000 during a civil society process linked to the G20 initiatives. This historical context set the stage for his core message that civil society in South Africa has been a pivotal force in social development well before the advent of the modern state, and thus must be central in any strategy to eradicate poverty.

**“Civil society is
not a new partner
but rather an
enduring pillar in
South Africa’s
socio-economic
progress”**

Mr. Ndlovu traced the evolution of civil society’s role, explaining that community-based Organisations and faith groups were delivering education and social services even in the colonial era, effectively providing the first local responses to societal needs. He highlighted that throughout the 20th century, especially during the struggle against apartheid (1912–1994), civil society organisations of various forms were at the forefront of driving change. At times, NGOs and community groups harboured some of “the greatest brains in society,” serving as think-tanks and incubators for ideas in an oppressed nation. He argued that this means that civil society is not a new partner but rather an enduring pillar in South Africa’s socio-economic progress.

Responding to the question, “How can CSOs and communities contribute to poverty eradication today?” Mr. Ndlovu pointed to the importance of building on the historical strengths of civil society. He noted that CSOs are uniquely positioned to tap into local knowledge, social capital, and community trust—resources that government initiatives may not always effectively access. Emphasising the value of grassroots participation, he stressed that policies and anti-poverty interventions must be informed by lived experiences, with CSOs serving as critical conduits for community voices. He also referred to ongoing efforts to redefine the partnership between civil society and the NDA, highlighting developments from the Social Sector Summit held in the past three years.

In conclusion, Mr. Ndlovu reaffirmed that sustainable poverty eradication must adopt a bottom-up approach. He emphasised that communities often possess viable solutions and that CSOs serve as engines for grassroots innovation and self-reliance. He urged both the government and the NDA to strengthen their support for CSOs through conducive legislation, adequate funding, and collaborative platforms. His remarks were well received by the audience, who welcomed the reaffirmation of civil society’s enduring legacy and transformative potential.

Chasing Impact for Sustainable Development (Youth Perspective)



MR RISUNA MALULEKE

CEO - YOUNG AFRICAN ENTREPRENEURSHIP INSTITUTE

“chasing impact means setting clear, measurable goals for poverty reduction and not being satisfied until those are met”

Representing a youth and innovation perspective, Mr. Maluleke’s talk focused on how entrepreneurship and digital innovation can catalyse sustainable community development, particularly in rural areas. Mr. Maluleke thanked the NDA for the opportunity to address such a critical gathering of civil society architects and positioned his remarks as a message of support from the youth entrepreneurship sector. Echoing themes introduced by earlier speakers, he noted that the conference’s theme is timely and apt as South Africa needs bold ideas, collaborative partnerships, and brave leadership now more than ever to tackle poverty. He praised the focus on positioning the NDA as a thought leader and amplifying CSOs, affirming that this is “exactly what needs to happen” given current socio-economic challenges.

Delving into content, Mr. Maluleke issued a call for us to chase impact in all development endeavours. Mr. Maluleke emphasised the transformative potential of digital technology and entrepreneurship in creating sustainable livelihoods, especially in an increasingly unpredictable and fast-changing world. He shared observations from his work that often, development initiatives and tech innovation are concentrated in urban centres, whereas rural communities are left behind.

His institute’s mission, accordingly, is to bring digital transformation and entrepreneurship training to rural youth, helping them become drivers of development in their communities. He cited examples of projects focusing on digital skills training for unemployed youth and supporting small enterprises in villages through technology, suggesting that these initiatives not only create jobs but also retain young talent in local areas, thereby slowing the urban migration that contributes to urban poverty.

A key point in Mr. Maluleke’s speech was the necessity of cross-sector collaboration. He echoed earlier calls for partnership, urging that government, the private sector, and civil society must work in concert. He pointed to the conference itself as a model of such collaboration, a space where ideas from grassroots activists and high-level policymakers are exchanged. The Young African Entrepreneurship Institute, he said, is eager to partner with entities like the NDA to scale up successful models. For example, if a community-based coding program or agribusiness project shows promise in one province, partnerships can help replicate it in other provinces.

In summary, Mr. Maluleke’s address reinforced that to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and national targets, all stakeholders must intensify their focus on impact, use technology and entrepreneurship as enablers, and maintain a collaborative spirit.

The CSO Landscape in South Africa (Department of Social Development)



MS MPHO MNGXITAMA

ACTING DDG - COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AT DSD

Ms. Mngxitama provided a policymaker's overview of the civil society sector, aiming to enhance understanding of its scope, characteristics, and the environment in which it operates. This session built a factual foundation to inform conference deliberations. She began by acknowledging the contributions of the previous speakers and noted that their thematic insights underscored why a strong CSO sector is indispensable. She then presented a high-level snapshot of the CSO sector in the country: the number of registered Non-Profit Organisations (NPOs) and community-based groups, their geographic spread, and the sectors in which they are active (such as poverty relief, childcare, healthcare, education, etc.). She highlighted that South Africa boasts thousands of registered NPOs and many more informal community initiatives, reflecting a vibrant tradition of self-organisation. However, not all registered Organisations are active or effective; many face sustainability challenges. This led her to discuss the challenges and gaps in the current CSO landscape.

One key challenge she identified is fragmentation and coordination. With such a large number of CSOs, efforts can be scattered and duplicative. To address this, she advocated for stronger networking platforms and data-sharing among CSOs, and a greater coordinating role for structures like the NDA and provincial social development forums.

 **Access Full Presentation**



[Click here to view and download DSD Presentation](#)



Another issue raised was capacity and resource disparities. Ms. Mngxitama pointed out that while some CSOs are well-established with professional staff and access to funding (often international donors or corporate social investment), the vast majority are small voluntary associations struggling with limited resources. This uneven capacity means that community impact can be inconsistent. She lauded NDA's capacity-building programmes and grant funding as crucial tools to uplift smaller, emerging CSOs, calling for these to be expanded and more widely accessed. By creating a better understanding of the CSO landscape, the goal is to tailor support to the different needs of micro, small, and larger CSOs.

In conclusion, she emphasised a hopeful outlook, indicating that despite the challenges, the CSO sector in South Africa remains robust and creative. She encouraged conference participants to leverage this rich landscape by forging partnerships and learning from each other. "Understanding our landscape", in her words, means recognising both the strengths (community rootedness, innovation, volunteerism) and the weaknesses (resource limitations, uneven capacity) of the sector. With that clear understanding, the NDA can better design interventions that ensure CSOs thrive and continue to be effective drivers of sustainable community development.



Voices from the Ground: CSO Testimonials



MS THUSO MOTAU- GP

IPADTS33 COOPERATIVE IN GA-RANKUWA

Ms. Motau recounted her cooperative's journey since its establishment in 2014, describing how a small sewing and manufacturing initiative in an industrial zone grew to create jobs for local women and youth. She credited NDA grant funding and training with helping formalise their operations and expand their product lines. Her testimonial highlighted challenges like accessing larger markets and the high cost of materials, but also successes such as securing school uniform contracts that not only generated income but also benefited local children (through affordable uniforms). This story illustrated how targeted support to community enterprises can yield both economic and social returns.

MR. THEMBEKILE KANISE - EC

CATHOLIC DEVELOPMENT CENTRE

The Catholic Development Centre (CDC) has been a key partner of the NDA since 1998, supporting initiatives such as governance training, leadership development, and financial management for emerging community-based organisations transitioning into formal non-profits. A notable collaboration was their joint intervention in the OR Tambo District following the 2013 Marikana tragedy, where they provided affected families with organic farming skills, market access, and youth employment opportunities. The CDC commended the NDA's role in ensuring accountability and impactful delivery. Still, it noted that its efforts are limited by inadequate resourcing, urging greater support to enable the NDA to continue its vital developmental work.



MS. MAKHOSAZANA SAMBO - MP

IKHWEZI POULTRY AND AGRICULTURE PRIMARY COOPERATIVE

Makhosazana Sambo, a determined social entrepreneur from Mpumalanga, is the visionary behind Ikhwezi Vegetable and Poultry Farming Cooperative, an agricultural enterprise that has grown steadily since its inception in 2000. Operating on 53 hectares of land, Ikhwezi has become a vital source of employment in the local community, currently supporting 30 permanent workers and 40 seasonal labourers. Makhosazana's journey has not been without adversity. In 2013, she survived a life-threatening accident that left her in a coma for three weeks. Her remarkable recovery and return to lead the cooperative stand as a powerful testimony of strength and resilience. Ikhwezi Cooperative continues to provide food security, employment, and hope to its surrounding communities, demonstrating the vital role of grassroots-led initiatives in driving sustainable rural development.



Voices from the Ground: CSO Testimonials

09



“Umsobomvu Bright Life Youth Centre is proving that when youth are empowered with skills, they don’t wait for change, they create it.”

MR VUYOLETHU PURSENT- NC **UMSOBOMVU BRIGHT LIFE YOUTH CENTRE**

From the small town of Noupoot in the Northern Cape, Umsobomvu Bright Life Youth Centre (UBLYC) is driving transformative change for young people and local communities. Established in 2019, UBLYC is a youth-led development organisation focused on eradicating poverty and equipping young people with practical skills to participate meaningfully in the economy.

Through a range of impactful programmes, including New Venture Creation, End User Computing, and Financial Literacy, UBLYC has upskilled 90 youth beneficiaries, resulting in the formation of three burial society cooperatives. Their innovative initiatives continue to grow: 150 youth are being trained in waste management and 100 in environmental management, with plans to form cooperatives in both areas, creating 250 new opportunities in the province. UBLYC is also running a Recognised Prior Learning programme for 100 municipal property assessor trainees to address critical skills gaps in the region. The NDA has played a pivotal role in UBLYC’s journey. Following a governance training, UBLYC successfully established the Mntla Koloni Farming Cooperative, a poultry project involving 13 trained youth beneficiaries and advancing food security and bringing hope to the Noupoot community.



“The NDA is truly a potential unlocker.”

MR PRINCE KHWERANA - LP **TSHILIMAGANA AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVE**

Tshilimagana Agricultural Cooperative, based in the remote village of Zwigodini, stands as a powerful example of resilience, innovation, and the transformative impact of targeted support. Founded in 2010 and formally registered in 2011, the cooperative began with limited resources, with one employee and half a hectare of land growing sweet potatoes, spinach, and beetroot. Despite its ambitious vision to eradicate poverty through job creation and food security in a deeply rural area, Tshilimagana initially struggled to secure assistance from government departments, many viewing its geographic isolation as a barrier. Yet the cooperative persisted, earning the nickname “the undying cooperative” for its unwavering determination.

A turning point came in 2013, when the NDA discovered the cooperative. Today, Tshilimagana employs 18 permanent and 120 seasonal workers, growing and packaging spinach, onions, and tomatoes and some of which supply major buyers like Tiger Brands. Its journey from under-resourced survival to agribusiness success showcases what can be achieved when local vision meets institutional support.

Voices from the Ground: CSO Testimonials



" Batho Ba Lerato proves that with the right support, empowered women become unstoppable agents of change."

MS LERATO MOENG - FS

BATHO BA LERATO NPO

Batho Ba Lerato, once focused solely on local human rights awareness campaigns in Thaba Nchu, has transformed into a dynamic driver of women's empowerment and community development, thanks to timely support from the NDA. Their journey began with a capacity building workshop hosted by the NDA, which equipped them with the skills to articulate their work and apply for funding. This turning point led to successful access to the Criminal Assets Recovery Account (CARA) fund, enabling targeted GBV awareness campaigns supported by local clinics and social workers. Through this, they not only uncovered the challenges faced by women in their community but also the untapped potential within them. The organisation mobilised local resources and skills, and began to formalise their impact, resulting in strategic partnerships with major stakeholders, including the University of the Free State. Today, over 100 women benefit from monthly income through their programmes, with some securing driver's licenses and others receiving paralegal training through support from the University of North West. With 25 women now fully employed in ongoing programmes, Batho Ba Lerato stands as a testament to how targeted capacity building, combined with vision and collaboration, can catalyse lasting community change.

MS PHUMZILE NTULI - KZN

QALEKHAYA PRIMARY COOPERATIVE

Founded by women in 2005, Qalekhaya Primary Cooperative in KwaZulu-Natal began by manufacturing school furniture. Facing seasonal demand, the cooperative expanded into agriculture and community development, establishing Shining Star NPO. With vital support from the NDA, including tools, raw materials, funding, and volunteer support, the cooperative grew its reach and impact. During COVID-19, they led health campaigns while also empowering local women and youth with skills in farming, carpentry, sewing, and more.

The NDA funded and supported 43 youth and women volunteers across the district. Qalekhaya and Shining Star went on to receive multiple accolades, including Best Cooperative in KwaZulu-Natal and Best Community Builder. Through consistent NDA support, the cooperative and its NPO became a beacon of empowerment, equipping women and youth with practical skills, generating livelihoods, and demonstrating the power of community-driven development.



" With NDA by our side, we don't just survive, we thrive and lead..."

Voices from the Ground: CSO Testimonials



MS TSHOLOFELO MOENG - NW

MA ROCKS LAUNDRY SERVICES

“When the door to employment closed, I built one of my own and opened it for others. Thanks to the NDA, I went from job seeker to job creator.”

Tsholofelo Moeng, a graduate of the North-West University of Technology, shared an inspiring story of resilience and innovation. Like many graduates, she faced months of unemployment despite sending out countless CVs. But instead of giving up, she made a bold decision to pursue entrepreneurship, starting a laundry business with a friend using just one washing machine and a simple washing line. Despite many obstacles, including rain and unreliable infrastructure, Tsholofelo and her team remained committed to excellent service. Their breakthrough came when they approached the National Development Agency, which provided crucial support, including industrial washing machines, dryers, a generator, water tanks, steam irons, marketing assistance, and training. As a result, the business expanded rapidly, gained media attention, and began employing local youth. Today, Tsholofelo proudly stands not only as a business owner but as a job creator, showing that with determination and the right support, young people can drive meaningful change in their communities.

MR VINCENT MOSEBE - WC

SOZO FOUNDATION, MOSEBE ENTERPRISE

Mr Vincent Mosebe, founder of Mosebe Enterprise and a proud beneficiary of the Sozo Foundation's Entrepreneurial programme funded by the NDA, shared an inspiring story of resilience and transformation rooted in the community of Vrygrond in the Western Cape. Against a backdrop of gang violence, substance abuse, and social exclusion, Vincent's desire to make a meaningful impact led him to volunteer as a tutor for local youth in maths and science. His journey took a pivotal turn in 2023 when he joined the NDA-supported Entrepreneurial programme, equipping him with the skills and confidence to launch a renewable energy enterprise focused on affordability and sustainability. Despite facing criticism and limited resources, Vincent persevered, eventually representing South Africa at the BRICS Plus Global South Innovation Awards, where his team earned second place. He credited the NDA's investment in youth innovation as the foundation of his success and urged fellow young people to shift from a culture of blame to one of solution-building and partnership with government. His message was a compelling reminder that with the right support, today's youth can become tomorrow's leaders and architects of a better future.



“With the right support, we can shift from a culture of blame to one of building solutions. Young people must see themselves as partners in shaping a better future.”

TESTIMONIALS CONCLUSION

COMMON THEMES

Throughout the testimonials, common themes emerged:

- **Impact of NDA Support:** Many speakers expressed gratitude to the NDA for grants, training, or networking opportunities. They credited these supports with enabling their projects to start or scale up. In concrete terms, NDA support had led to the acquisition of new equipment, enhanced skills, or the credibility to attract partners.
- **Community Ownership:** The projects were community-driven and addressed local needs, be it agricultural productivity, education, healthcare, or enterprise development. The pride and ownership in each representative's voice were evident. They demonstrated that when communities are the drivers, projects tend to be more culturally appropriate and gain local buy-in.
- **Challenges:** Despite successes, challenges were candidly discussed. Funding remains a constant struggle, and sustainability after initial grants is a worry. Several mentioned difficulties like accessing markets, obtaining long-term funding, or needing more advanced training in areas like marketing or monitoring and evaluation. Regulatory hurdles (e.g., compliance with government requirements) were also touched on by a few.
- **Partnership and Support:** The testimonials collectively called for continued and expanded support. They invited government departments, the private sector, and donors to look at their models and help replicate or upscale them. The underlying ask was for a multi-stakeholder partnership to amplify what's already working on the ground.

These presentations put human faces on the issues discussed earlier in abstract; they underscored why policies and programmes must be responsive to actual community contexts. By the end of the ninth testimonial, the atmosphere was one of inspiration and renewed urgency.

In conclusion, the Voices from the Ground session achieved its purpose. It amplified the voices of community leaders and demonstrated the tangible impacts of CSO initiatives, validating the conference's emphasis on civil society as true drivers of development.



Keynote Address by the Minister of Social Development



MR PETER NETSHIPALE

DIRECTOR GENERAL - DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

The conference reached a pinnacle with the Keynote Address delivered by the Minister of Social Development, Ms. Nokuzola Sisisi Tolashe, MP, the Minister of Social Development. This address was highly anticipated as it promised to outline the government's policy agenda for poverty eradication and situate the conference deliberations within national priorities. The Minister's presence underscored the importance of the gathering and provided a direct line of communication between grassroots delegates and high-level policy direction.

“A stalwart and a mother figure in the struggle against poverty”

Before the Minister spoke, Mr. Peter Netshipale, Director-General of Social Development, formally introduced her to the conference. Mr. Netshipale's introduction described the Minister as both a “stalwart” and a “mother” figure in the struggle against poverty, someone who intimately understands the plight of the poor and is committed to action.

MS. NOKUZOLA (SISISI)TOLASHE,MP

MINISTER OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Minister Tolashe expressed her appreciation for the rich inputs from the morning sessions. Her keynote address was comprehensive and delivered in a formal yet empathetic tone, reflecting her dual identity as a government official and long-time community activist. The main points of her address can be summarised as follows:

- **Government's Anti-Poverty Agenda:** Minister Tolashe outlined the broad strokes of the national strategy to eradicate poverty, aligning with the theme “Fighting Poverty,” which was echoed as a hashtag throughout the event. She reiterated that poverty eradication is a top priority of the current administration. Key pillars of this agenda include job creation through economic stimulus, expansion of social protection programs, land reform, and improved access to quality education and healthcare for the poor. She specifically mentioned the recent policy milestone of legislation enabling land expropriation without compensation for development purposes, framing it as a corrective measure to historical dispossession that has perpetuated poverty. This point drew applause, particularly from delegates who are aware of the link between land, livelihoods, and poverty in South Africa's context.



“

We are at war with poverty and that war demands bold policy shifts, collective resolve, and a deep commitment to restoring dignity through justice, jobs, and access to opportunity.

Keynote Address by the Minister of Social Development Continues...



"CSOs are the ears, eyes, and hands of government on the ground and indispensable partners in the fight against poverty."

- **The Role of Civil Society:** The Minister emphasised that the government cannot achieve its anti-poverty goals alone. She acknowledged CSOs as indispensable partners, the “ears, eyes, and hands” of both the community and government on the ground. Minister Tolashe praised the work of CSOs in filling service gaps and innovating solutions, citing examples from the CSOs’ testimonials that had just taken place. She assured delegates that the Social Development Ministry values the input of civil society and will strengthen mechanisms for regular consultation and collaboration.
- **Repositioning the NDA:** The Minister addressed directly the conference’s core purpose of repositioning the NDA. She candidly noted that when she assumed office, even she was not fully aware of the scope of the NDA’s work, which signalled that the Agency’s profile and documented impact needed elevating. Thus, one of her first directives was to convene this conference to shine a spotlight on the NDA and the Civil Society sector. Minister Tolashe commended the NDA leadership for embracing the NDA “turnaround strategy” and urged the NDA to ensure it is not just a plan on paper, but a living change embraced by all. She pledged her ministry’s support in making the NDA more visible, more effective, and more accountable as a champion of community development.

- **Policy Announcements and Initiatives:** The Minister used the opportunity to highlight a few specific initiatives:

1. The development of an integrated Anti-Poverty Strategy. This strategy aims to align various government programs and improve coordination, ensuring that efforts by different departments and agencies (including NDA) complement rather than duplicate each other.
2. A push for youth employment and skills development as a poverty reduction strategy. She referenced the Presidential Youth Employment Initiative and encouraged CSOs to participate in mobilising and skilling youth, citing the earlier example of the coding club from the testimonials.
3. Strengthening social safety nets, the Minister reaffirmed the government’s commitment to social grants and hinted at ongoing discussions about a Basic Income Support for the unemployed poor, which drew nods from many NGO representatives who advocate for such measures.
4. Aligning with Commission 4’s theme, she spoke about promoting community-owned enterprises (cooperatives, social enterprises) as a means to empower communities economically. The Minister mentioned that her department would be reviewing how its funding instruments (like the NDA grants and other poverty relief funds) could better support such models that keep wealth in communities.

“

We must support community-owned enterprises that keep wealth in communities ... this is how we empower our people and break the cycle of poverty.

Keynote Address by the Minister of Social Development Continues...(Call to Action)



“Best ideas are often born in the community halls, not in boardrooms”

Toward the end of her speech, Minister Tolashe issued a call to various stakeholders:

- **To government officials and the NDA:** “Leave this conference with not just recommendations, but responsibilities.” She tasked the government sector to incorporate what they heard into tangible actions. For example, if a policy adjustment is needed to remove red tape for CSOs, it should be pursued; if additional budget is justified for NDA programs based on demonstrated impact, it should be advocated for in government.
- **To civil society leaders:** “Hold us accountable, and continue to innovate.” She encouraged CSOs to maintain their watchdog role and speak up about what is and is not working in government programs. She also urged the sector to continue pioneering new approaches at the community level, stating that often the best ideas are born in the community halls, not in boardrooms.
- **To the private sector and donors:** “Join hands with us.” Acknowledging that resources are limited, she called on businesses and international partners to invest in poverty eradication programs, whether through corporate social investment in community projects or through public-private partnerships that can create jobs and infrastructure in poor areas.

Throughout the address, Minister Tolashe’s tone was one of solidarity with conference participants. Her closing remark, delivered partly in isiXhosa, translated to: “Let us work together, as one, to make poverty history in our country.”

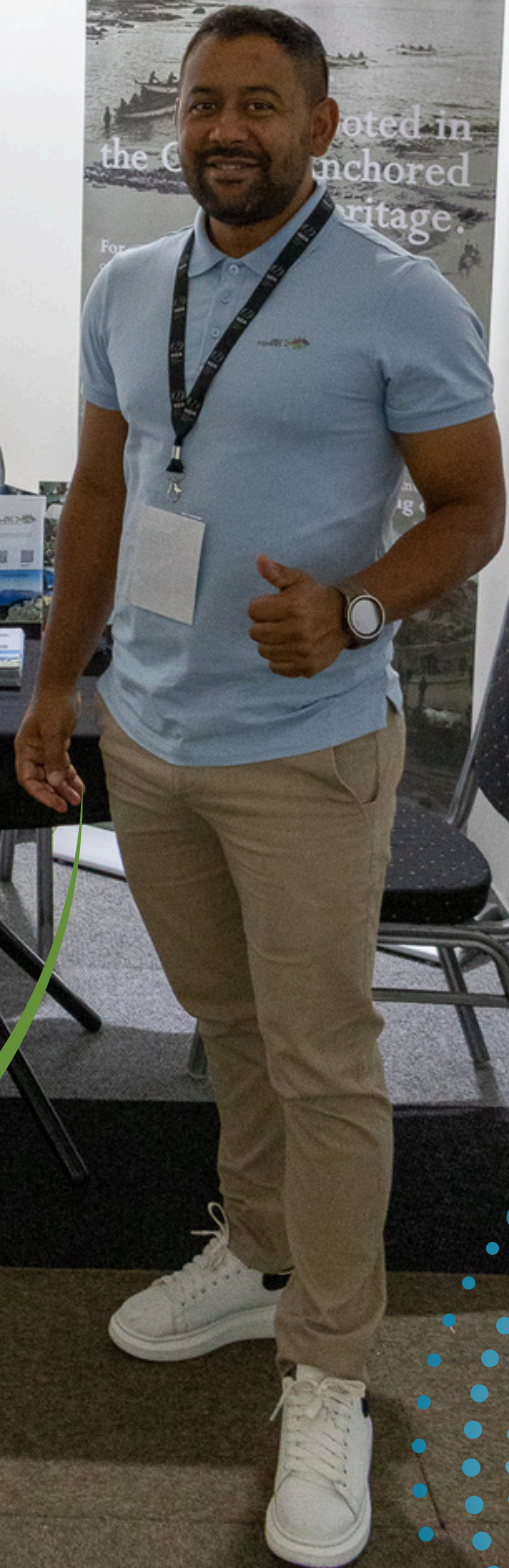
In summary, the keynote address firmly anchored the conference in the national context, provided clarity on government direction, and importantly, validated the efforts of CSOs and the NDA. It served both as a blueprint and a morale booster for delegates.

“

Let us work together, as one, to make poverty history in our country.

Only Fishers Secondary Cooperative

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Plenary Reflections and Discussion

The conference transitioned towards a plenary session dedicated to Reflections on the presentations and open discussion among all delegates. This segment allowed participants, CSO representatives, government officials, and other stakeholders to engage in dialogue, ask questions, and share comments prompted by the morning's rich proceedings.

Key points and issues raised during the plenary discussion included:

- Acknowledgement of Common Themes:** Several participants began by noting the complementary messages across the earlier presentations. One delegate from an NGO coalition pointed out how Mr. Buthelezi's emphasis on partnership and Mr. Ndlovu's historical perspective dovetailed with the Minister's call for collaboration, suggesting a strong alignment between civil society and government views. This was seen as an encouraging sign that there is common ground to build upon.
- Call for Clear Action Plan:** A recurring question from CSO delegates was, "What happens after this conference?" Participants were eager to know how the insights and recommendations would be translated into action. One community leader from the Eastern Cape asked if there would be a formal declaration or plan published, and how CSOs could be involved in monitoring its implementation. In response, an NDA official assured that a comprehensive conference report would be compiled and circulated, and that the NDA would set up a follow-up mechanism, possibly a task team including some CSO representatives, to track progress. This foreshadowed the commitments given in the closing session by the NDA leadership.
- Resource Mobilisation and Funding:** Many CSO representatives took the opportunity to highlight the chronic issue of a lack of funding. They expressed appreciation for NDA grants but noted that the scale of need far outstrips available resources. A representative of a rural development forum suggested exploring innovative funding models such as social impact bonds or community trusts, and asked if the NDA or Ministry had plans to leverage private capital for social good. An official from the Department of Social Development acknowledged the funding gap and mentioned that Commission 2 (on partnerships and resource mobilisation) would delve deeper into these ideas. He also referenced ongoing discussions with National Treasury to ensure sustained funding for NDA initiatives.
- NDA's Role and Capacity:** A few speakers from civil society gently questioned whether the NDA itself has the capacity to fulfil the heightened expectations now being placed on it. They cited instances in the past of slow grant disbursements or limited outreach in some provinces. In a constructive tone, they suggested that as the NDA undergoes its "turnaround," it should also invest in its own capacity by hiring more field officers, decentralising services to provincial offices, and improving communication with applicants.

Mr. Thabani Buthelezi (Acting CEO of NDA) welcomed these suggestions. He reported that the NDA is indeed strengthening its provincial presence and improving systems.

Plenary Reflections and Discussion Continues...

- **Policy and Regulatory Environment:** Some discussion revolved around how government policy could better support CSOs. For example, a delegate from a faith-based Organisation raised concern about the red tape in obtaining certain approvals (like feeding scheme certifications or childcare facility registrations), which can delay community initiatives. In response, delegates were urged to contribute specific recommendations when breaking into commissions (particularly Commission 3 on accountability and feedback mechanisms) so that these could be taken up at the policy level.
- **Inclusivity and Reach:** Another theme in the discussion was ensuring that no community is left behind. Representatives from more remote or marginalised communities (such as informal settlements, or provinces like Northern Cape that often get less attention) voiced a plea that the outcomes of this conference lead to tangible benefits even in the farthest-flung areas. One speaker asked if the NDA could conduct outreach sessions post-conference in all provinces to share the outcomes and continue the dialogue locally. The NDA Board Chairperson, Ms. Ruth Bhengu, responded positively to this, mentioning that as Board Chair, she would advocate for a roadshow or provincial feedback workshops, aligning with the NDA's ethos of being close to the communities.
- **Urgency and Accountability:** Perhaps the most emotive contribution came from a youth activist who reminded everyone of the daily realities of poverty, such as hunger, joblessness, despair, which cannot wait for long processes. ***“We have to act fast; people are suffering now,”*** she implored. Her remarks put a human face on the urgency. In terms of accountability, she and others suggested setting time-bound targets (e.g., “Within one year, how many new partnerships will NDA forge? How many more CSOs will receive support?”) and publicly reporting on progress.

Overall, the plenary reflections session was candid and forward-looking. It served as a barometer of the delegates' priorities and concerns, sustaining momentum, securing resources, cutting bureaucracy, and delivering quickly and broadly.



Breakaway Commissions

Mr Nkhensani Mthembu, Grants Manager at the NDA, provided delegates with clear instructions regarding the logistical arrangements for the breakaway commission sessions. Participants joined allocated commissions as scheduled. The topics were defined in advance by the programme and corresponded to key challenges identified in the civil society and poverty eradication arena. The commissions and their focus areas were as follows:

- **Commission 1:** Maximising the impact of NDA grant funding & capacity building
- **Commission 2:** Innovative approaches to enhance strategic partnerships and resource mobilisation for sustainable development
- **Commission 3:** CSO feedback & accountability mechanisms for NDA interventions
- **Commission 4:** Community-Owned Enterprises: Path to stronger and impactful CSOs.

Each commission was tasked with deliberating on its specific thematic area and preparing a report to be presented during the plenary session on the following day, 09 May 2025. This marked the conclusion of Day One of the Civil Society Organisation Ministerial Conference.





DAY 2
09 MAY 2025

Reflections From Day 1



MR THEMBINKOSI JOSOPU

BOARD MEMBER - NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

Mr. Josopu delivered opening remarks that set the tone for the second day of the Civil Society Organisation Ministerial Conference. He noted that the day's engagements would delve more substantively into the core themes of poverty eradication and collaborative action. Mr Josopu echoed the Minister's earlier call for greater partnership and alignment across sectors to avoid the persistent policy and coordination fragmentation that has historically weakened South Africa's poverty response. He pointed to the importance of hearing from partners such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which would contribute insights on integrated development solutions.

Acknowledging time constraints and the anticipated departure of some delegates, Mr Josopu requested the allocated Commission leads to prepare their reporting processes. He advised that plenary engagement would prioritise inputs and proposed solutions over extended debate or detailed corrections.

He concluded by announcing that the programme would continue with remarks from Mr Tshefuta from NEDLAC Community Constituency, followed by a keynote address and formal closing by the Deputy Minister of Social Development. He then formally welcomed to the stage Ms Namhla Mniki from the Presidency, commending her leadership in Women's Economic Empowerment and her role in coordinating the national anti-poverty strategy. He emphasised that the NDA must be positioned at the centre of this strategy, given its legislated mandate and developmental role, and hinted at ongoing efforts to ensure its centrality within national planning processes.

**“The NDA must
be in the Centre
of the Country's
Anti-Poverty
Strategy”**



Government Anti-Poverty Strategy



MS NAMHLA MNIKI

PRESIDENCY

Ms Namhla Mniki, representing The Presidency, delivered a compelling and strategic presentation on the national anti-poverty strategy titled “Poverty Erased, Hope Raised.” Her address framed poverty not as a reflection of individual incapacity, but as a systemic and structural issue rooted in unequal access to income-generating pathways, despite South Africa's wealth in human and material resources.

She began by emphasising that South Africans are not poor people, highlighting the need to shift the national narrative from one of deficiency to one of capability. She noted that while 40% of households live below the poverty line, this is not due to a lack of capacity, but rather due to limited and fragmented access to economic opportunity.

Ms Mniki contextualised the strategy against the backdrop of a nation spending R1.3 trillion annually on its social wage, including education, healthcare, and social grants. Despite this, deep and persistent poverty remains, largely due to a mismatch between the scale of the problem and the limited, fragmented nature of interventions across various departments.

Through a mapping exercise involving 13 government departments, the Presidency identified significant duplication and inefficiencies in poverty alleviation programmes. The strategy seeks to overcome this by building a massified, integrated national livelihoods programme, focused on unlocking income pathways through formal employment, informal enterprise, self-employment, and local resource-based initiatives.

Key Pillars and Strategic Shifts Presented:

- **Reframing Social Protection:** While South Africa's social security system is one of the strongest globally, it must be expanded to create real exit pathways from poverty by linking social grant recipients to income-generating opportunities.
- **Livelihoods-Centred Development:** The strategy positions livelihoods as the cornerstone of national poverty eradication. Every household should be involved in some form of income-generating activity beyond grants, tailored to their district's unique resources.

"let's bring the land back to the hands of women so they can actually begin to grow, produce in that land."

Government Anti-Poverty Strategy continues...



"community-led innovation and mobilisation as the engine for transformative change"

- **Enabling Ecosystem:** A supportive ecosystem must be established, including access to water, land, skills development, financing, and market linkages, especially for women and rural communities.
- **Productive Human Settlements and Food Security:** Human settlements projects should be leveraged as entry points for public employment and livelihoods, while food production should be community-led and income-generating.
- **Scaling Informal and Micro Enterprises:** The strategy calls for the creation of 2 million new work opportunities through focused support to micro and small enterprises, particularly within the informal sector.
- **Unbreakable Chain of Support:** Ms Mniki introduced the concept of an "unbreakable chain of responses", a coordinated system in which no individual falls through the cracks. This involves seamless transitions from social protection to livelihoods, education, employment, or enterprise development.

Call to Civil Society

Ms Mniki called upon civil society organisations to play a critical role in designing and piloting scalable livelihood interventions grounded in local knowledge and assets. She emphasised the NDA's readiness to support CSOs in co-creating tailored livelihood packages that can be replicated and mainstreamed nationally.

She closed by urging all stakeholders to adopt a decade-long focus on livelihoods as the anchor of poverty eradication. Drawing from international models such as China's rural development approach, she advocated for community-led innovation and mobilisation as the engine for transformative change.

 **Access Full Presentation**

[Click here to view and download the full presentation from The Presidency](#)



OR



Community Close the Gap (Commission 1)



"Maximising the Impact of NDA Grant Funding and Capacity Building"

The objective of this commission, under the theme: Maximising the impact of NDA Grant Funding and Capacity Building, was to identify practical strategies to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of NDA-funded initiatives. Participants in this Commission emphasised the need to simplify the grant application process, introduce a tiered funding model for emerging and established CSOs, and allow for both operational and administrative costs. Improved NDA visibility and multi-platform access to funding were also highlighted as key to inclusivity.

Capacity-building interventions should be tailored to varying literacy levels and linked to mentorship, market access, and practical skills. Strengthening "train-the-trainer" models and conducting pre-implementation assessments were identified as priorities.

To enhance impact, the commission recommended direct supplier payments, strengthened M&E, CSO involvement in programme design, and replicability of successful models. Lessons from past initiatives underscored the importance of budget discipline, collaboration, and moving away from top-down approaches.

Recommendations included increasing NDA's community-level presence, conducting due diligence before disbursing funds, and establishing a stakeholder forum to monitor progress. The commission concluded with a call to align funding with national priorities and community needs, supported by a results-based and sustainability-focused funding framework.

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Community Close the Gap
Commission Presentation](#)



OR



The Giraffes (Commission 2)



**"Innovative
Approaches to
Enhance Strategic
Partnerships and
Resource
Mobilisation for
Sustainable
Development"**

This commission explored innovative mechanisms to improve the financial sustainability of CSOs through strategic partnerships and diversified funding. The group focused on rethinking funding models by promoting blended finance, crowdfunding, and profit-making strategies within legal bounds. CSOs were encouraged to register on government platforms like the National Treasury Central Supplier Database (CSD) to access service-based income.

For long-term financial sustainability, the commission proposed leveraging the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) through online visibility, adopting sustainability plans, building alternative income streams, and collaborating with other CSOs. Capacity building, especially in financial management and human resource development, was seen as essential.

To unlock resources, participants recommended forming strategic partnerships with municipalities, provincial governments, private sector actors, and Development Finance Institutions (DFIs). CSOs should actively engage in local forums and pursue Memoranda of Agreement (MOAs) with key stakeholders.

Key Recommendations included: NDA to review existing CSO funding frameworks and facilitate a broader funding policy review. The government to regulate Corporate Social Investment (CSI) and explore the introduction of a national poverty fund. Alternative funding mechanisms such as social impact bonds, bridge funding, and research-linked funding should be developed to attract donor support.

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The Giraffes Commission
Presentation](#)



OR



Ingwenya (Commission 3)



This commission focused on the importance of structured, inclusive feedback systems between Civil Society Organisations and the NDA. Participants recommended the establishment of both physical and digital comment platforms, provincial roadshows, and local information hubs to ensure that CSO voices inform NDA decision-making. Advisory committees and feedback sessions on funding processes were also proposed as necessary mechanisms for inclusion. Improving monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems was seen as critical. Recommendations included aligning Annual Performance Plans (APPs) with strategic goals, partnering with CSOs for participatory monitoring, and agreeing on transparent, shared M&E criteria.

"CSO Feedback and Mechanisms for NDA Interventions"

To identify and replicate successful community-owned enterprise (COE) models, participants advocated for beneficiary testimonials, peer-to-peer exchanges, best practice frameworks, and long-term impact tracking. Strengthening CSO-NDA collaboration was identified as vital to programme success. This included early-stage CSO involvement in programme design, joint needs assessments, capacity building, and differentiated support for NPOs and co-operatives. Media and private sector linkages were also proposed for broader impact and visibility.

Key Recommendations:

- Revision of the NDA funding model and the improvement of accessibility to services.
- Establish CSO forums and institutionalise consultations at national and local levels.
- Leverage partnerships for capacity building and technical support, especially for COEs.
- Address fragmentation through coordinated development forums and ecosystems.

Key Insight: "Poverty can be eradicated through partnerships and strong accountability mechanisms."

Call to Action: Strengthen CSO partnerships, co-develop localised interventions, and employ robust feedback and accountability structures to drive sustainable development.

 **Access Full Presentation**

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[The Ingwenya Commission Presentation](#)



OR

SCAN ME



Amabhubesi (Commission 4)



"Community Based Enterprises: Path to stronger and impactful CSOs"

This commission explored the critical role of community-based enterprises in driving sustainable development and strengthening CSOs. Delegates highlighted the importance of local ownership, vision-driven initiatives, and succession planning to ensure long-term success. Training, mentorship, and access to infrastructure and markets were identified as essential for capacity building and sustainability.

Discussions emphasised integrating entrepreneurship into poverty reduction strategies through value chain participation, incubation programmes, systems strengthening, and mindset change, particularly for marginalised groups. The commission also stressed the need to reform restrictive municipal by-laws, simplify licensing and procurement processes, and ensure inclusive tax and compliance frameworks for small enterprises.

Digital transformation was seen as a key driver of community enterprise growth. Recommendations included expanding digital infrastructure, training in e-commerce and cybersecurity, and enabling youth and women to access online markets and develop digital skills.

Key Recommendations:

- Promote collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and skills transfer among CBEs.
- Reform local regulatory frameworks to support small-scale enterprises.
- Develop inclusive funding models and expand access to mentorship and resources.
- Advocate for policy and infrastructure improvements to support digital and enterprise development.

Key Insight: Community participation, flexible funding, and regulatory reform are essential to scaling impactful community-based enterprises.

Call to Action: NDA and partners must co-create enabling ecosystems through collaboration, policy advocacy, and practical support mechanisms.

Access Full Presentation

[Click here to view and download The Amabhubesi Commission Presentation](#)



OR



Plenary Discussion on Commission Outcomes



After all four commission reports were presented, the floor was opened for a general plenary engagement on the combined commission outcomes. Delegates expressed broad support, and the discussion shifted towards synthesising the recommendations and prioritising key actions.

Key points from this discussion included:

Prioritisation: Given the extensive list of recommendations, participants contemplated which should be tackled first. A consensus emerged around a few “early wins”:

- Forming the NDA-CSO Advisory Committee (Commission 3) was seen as a top priority because it would become a vehicle to drive many other changes in tandem with NDA leadership.
- Setting up the Multi-Stakeholder Partnership Forum (Commission 2) was another priority, as it could quickly bring more players to the table and generate resources and partnerships in support of other actions (like funding enterprises or increasing grant pools).
- Strengthening the capacity building and mentorship program (Commission 1) was noted as something NDA could start implementing in its next funding cycle without needing huge policy shifts, yielding direct benefits to current and new grantees.

Integration into Policy/Strategy: The delegate from The Presidency, Ms. Mniki, took the mic to appreciate how the commission outputs align with the Anti-Poverty Strategy. She promised to take the conference recommendations back to the national Anti-Poverty Steering Committee. Particularly, the focus on partnership (Comm 2) and community enterprise (Comm 4) would be woven into that strategy’s action plans.

NDA’s Commitment: Mr. Thabani Buthelezi stated clearly that the Agency embraces these recommendations. He indicated that, pending formal Board approval where needed, the NDA would incorporate them into its strategic and operational plans. He mentioned immediate steps like revising the NDA grant guidelines (Commission 1 suggestions) and improving transparency by publishing grant information (Commission 3 suggestions) in the next quarter. Moreover, he committed that the conference report would be circulated to all participants and widely within the government to ensure everyone is aware of the sector’s voice.

Resource Implications: Mr Josopu, the NDA Board member, noted that some recommendations, like increasing grant sizes or setting up new funds, have resource implications. He suggested that, armed with these strong outcomes and backed by the Department, the NDA could make a case in the next budget cycle for more funding from National Treasury or from donors. The stakeholder messages coming up (from UNDP, ABSA, etc.) might also hint at resource commitments. Thus, the plan is to leverage the momentum and goodwill from this conference to actually secure means to implement the ideas.

" Synthesising the recommendations and prioritising key actions"

Plenary Discussion on Commission Outcomes Continues...



Timeline and Accountability: Delegates urged that an implementation plan with timelines be drawn. It was proposed that within one month, the NDA and Department should convene a post-conference meeting to develop an action plan with timelines for each major recommendation and assign responsible persons or units. Additionally, it was proposed that a follow-up mini-conference or review workshop be convened within a year to assess progress on the adopted resolutions, in alignment with the accountability principles emphasised during the conference.

Inclusivity of Outcomes: A point was raised to ensure that in implementing these recommendations, the diversity of CSOs is respected, and small, rural organisations should be as involved as larger urban NGOs. Also, provincial and local government actors (who were perhaps less represented at the conference) need to be looped in, since many actions (like enterprise support, local partnerships) require their engagement. The idea of provincial dissemination workshops was reiterated.

The plenary discussion on the commission reports was notably action-oriented, with a strong emphasis on translating dialogue into implementation. There was a sense of demonstrable enthusiasm among participants, who clearly articulated how the proposed changes could meaningfully improve conditions within their communities and operational contexts. By the conclusion of the session, a collective sentiment emerged that the conference had yielded tangible, actionable outcomes which, if effectively implemented, hold the potential to significantly advance poverty eradication efforts and reinforce the capacity and impact of the civil society sector.

"Synthesising the recommendations and prioritising key actions"



Stakeholders Messages of Support

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MR BONGANI MATOMELA

UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME (UNDP -SA)

Mr. Matomela, a senior UNDP official in South Africa, began by congratulating the Ministry of Social Development and NDA on convening this timely conference. He stated that the UNDP fully aligns with the conference's theme of amplifying civil society's role in poverty eradication, as it resonates with the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG1 (No Poverty) and SDG17 (Partnerships for the Goals). He emphasised UNDP's belief in a "whole-of-society approach" to development, where government, civil society, and private sector each play vital roles. Mr. Matomela highlighted some of UNDP's work in South Africa that complements the conference topics, for example, UNDP's support for social entrepreneurship programs, capacity building for NGOs on SDG localisation, and pilot projects on community resilience. Crucially, he expressed UNDP's commitment to support the follow-up of this conference. This could include technical assistance in articulating the Anti-Poverty Strategy, funding or co-funding innovative projects emerging from the conference (like community enterprise models), and facilitating knowledge exchange with other countries that have successful civil society-government collaboration models. He invited the NDA and the Department to engage with UNDP on integrating the conference recommendations into the UN's development cooperation framework for South Africa. His message reinforced that the United Nations sees civil society empowerment as key to sustainable development and stands ready to assist with global expertise and resources.

"whole-of-society approach to development"

MR SIZWE MKWANAZI

UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG

Mr Sizwe Mkwanaazi, a researcher from the University of Johannesburg and Fellow at the Africa Cooperatives Institute of South Africa, commended the crucial role CSOs play in addressing the root causes of poverty. He urged CSOs to proactively position themselves within the national formalisation of the Early Childhood Development (ECD) sector by tapping into opportunities across the ECD value chain, such as uniform production, nutrition systems, infrastructure, and renewable energy installations. He also emphasised the importance of rethinking how CSOs are structured, advocating for a human development approach to counter the tendency of individual ownership within the sector. Drawing on his practical academic work with cooperatives in school uniform production, Mr Mkwanaazi highlighted the need for improved production systems to enhance competitiveness and sustainability. Lastly, he stressed that short-term training is insufficient for cooperative development



" There is a need for improved production systems to enhance competitiveness and sustainability. "

Stakeholders Messages of Support

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MR COLIN LESHOU

SMALL ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT AND FINANCE AGENCY (SEDFA)

Mr. Leshou, representing the Small Enterprise Development and Finance Agency (SEDFA), delivered a message of support, applauding the NDA's leadership in uniting government and civil society in the fight against poverty. He emphasised the alignment between SEDFA's mandate and the conference theme, highlighting the role of small enterprise development and social entrepreneurship in building inclusive, sustainable local economies.

"Sustainable development is a shared responsibility grounded in justice, dignity, and partnership."

SEDFA works to formalise and support small, micro, and informal enterprises, especially in rural and township areas, by providing finance, training, and enterprise development services. Mr. Leshou acknowledged civil society organisations as vital partners embedded in communities, often working with informal traders, youth innovators, and home-based producers. He encouraged CSOs to harness social entrepreneurship as a tool for driving impact and sustainability, pointing to examples like community bakeries and youth-led tech hubs as models of scalable, mission-driven innovation.

He concluded by affirming SEDFA's commitment to collaborating with the NDA and CSOs to build local ecosystems for inclusive growth, aligned with national development policies. His closing remark echoed a call to action: Sustainable development is a shared responsibility grounded in justice, dignity, and partnership.



Stakeholders Messages of Support

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MR THULANI TSHEFUTA

OVERALL CONVENOR - NEDLAC COMMUNITY CONSTITUENCY

Mr Tshefuta commended the conference for its action-oriented focus, free from internal contestations, and emphasised the importance of partnership-based development that recognises the complementary roles of civil society and government. He underscored that communities hold inherent social capital and are not passive recipients but active holders of solutions to local challenges. Tshefuta advocated for asset-based development and stressed that some programmes are best delivered by civil society, particularly in underserved areas. He called for proper resourcing of CSOs, asserting that funding must follow function to enable delivery. Reflecting on global lessons, particularly from China, he identified four interlinked pillars to address poverty as education, employment, social protection, and entrepreneurship.

"Interlinked pillars to address poverty: education, employment, social protection, and entrepreneurship."

He criticised the misuse of Corporate Social Investment (CSI) as a veil for anti-transformation, urging regulatory interventions to redirect such funds toward meaningful community impact. He advocated for government procurement to prioritise CSO products, especially in agriculture and social services, asserting that the government holds the power to shift economic participation without private sector permission. He announced the formation and imminent launch of Civil Society South Africa as an apex body and highlighted its role in upcoming G20 processes. He concluded by calling for the repositioning of the NDA as a government-wide agency beyond social development, capable of implementing a coordinated national poverty eradication strategy in partnership with organised civil society.



Introduction of the Deputy Minister

30



MR THABANI BUTHELEZI

ACTING CEO - NDA

Mr Thabani Buthelezi, on behalf of the National Development Agency, formally introduced the Deputy Minister of Social Development, Mr Mogamad Ganief Ebrahim Hendricks, to deliver the closing remarks of the conference. He began by acknowledging the presence of several dignitaries, including the MEC for KwaZulu-Natal, Ms Nonhlanhla Khoza, the Chairperson of the NDA Board, Ms Nozabelo Ruth Bhengu, fellow Board Member and Programme Director, Mr Josopu, and Members of the Portfolio Committee on Social Development, Rev Nhlanhla Bernard Gcwabaza, and Ms Nokwethemba Mtshweni.

Mr Buthelezi expressed gratitude for the valuable contributions made throughout the day, particularly by participants from the floor, noting that the NDA had taken careful note of all inputs and would outline the next steps in due course. He commended the inclusive spirit of the conference, citing a compelling example of a young participant who, despite not being formally invited, courageously shared his challenges, underscoring the openness and impact of the platform.

He concluded by welcoming Deputy Minister Hendricks, emphasising the significance of his address in charting the way forward for development and social cohesion.





Conference Closing Address

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MR MOGAMAD GANIEF EBRAHIM HENDRICKS **DEPUTY MINISTER OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

The Deputy Minister of Social Development, Mr. Mogamad Ganief Ebrahim Hendricks, commenced his remarks by expressing appreciation for the vibrant opening of the conference, notably highlighting the performance by the award-winning gospel singer Ntethe and the skilled moderation by Ms. Masechaba Mposwa. He applauded the overall energy and tone of the event, attributing its success in part to the calibre of individuals participating.

Mr. Hendricks formally acknowledged the NDA Board Chairperson, Ms. Ruth Bhengu, the Acting CEO, Mr. Buthelezi, board members, MEC of Social Development - KZN, Civil society stakeholders, and all delegates present. He commended the NDA Executive and staff for successfully organising a high-level and ambitious conference, noting the complexity and scale of such an undertaking. He further praised the quality of the commission report-back sessions and encouraged the NDA to consider all proposals tabled. Where issues fall beyond the NDA's mandate, he advised that the Acting CEO should compile a Cabinet Memorandum to be sponsored by the Deputy Minister at the relevant Cabinet cluster, ensuring appropriate escalation and response at the national level.

Focusing on the theme of food poverty eradication, Mr. Hendricks reiterated that this objective, set for achievement by 2030, is a priority under the National Development Plan. He emphasised the constraints of current social assistance mechanisms, highlighting the R370 monthly Social Relief of Distress (SRD) grant as the sole financial support presently available for many. While a future target of R760 is envisioned to cover food needs alone, he noted that this remains inadequate when considering broader needs such as transport, housing, and clothing. The Deputy Minister stressed that government cannot eradicate food poverty alone and highlighted the critical role CSOs play in sustaining livelihoods and service delivery.

He praised the NDA for convening a platform that enabled meaningful engagement with diverse stakeholders, including grassroots CSOs from various provinces. He personally acknowledged and supported CSO innovation, referencing local products and agricultural initiatives showcased at the conference, including his own purchase of organic produce.

The Deputy Minister reflected on the relevance of the conference theme, stating that the Department of Social Development relies on both the NDA and CSOs to lead and support the eradication of poverty. He described the NDA as a vital "think tank" and strategic enabler in the development space. Drawing from the Acting CEO's commitment to capacitate and fund CSOs,

Conference Closing Address Continues...



Mr. Hendricks encouraged organisations to use the NDA's expertise and resources to advance their work. He reflected on the historical significance and legacy of CSOs in South Africa, citing personal examples from District Six during the struggle era. Acknowledging the resilience and contribution of CSOs over the past three decades, he called for renewed confidence in the sector as a key development partner.

Mr. Hendricks affirmed the Government of National Unity's strength and its continued leadership over the coming years, emphasising that the government's success depends on a vibrant and organised CSO sector. He called for improved systems of communication, cooperation, and collaboration between government, CSOs, and the private sector. Commending the NDA for identifying high-impact organisations through its service delivery improvement programme, he stressed the importance of accountability, ethics, and evidence-based feedback from CSOs to strengthen national development interventions.

In addressing economic transformation, the Deputy Minister reiterated the importance of localisation, a flagship policy of the Sixth Administration. He urged CSOs to explore the manufacturing of priority products identified by the government, using peanut butter as a key example. He stated that certain goods should be exclusively produced by qualifying CSOs and distributed through accessible outlets nationwide. He noted the need for implementation of this policy, which has remained underutilised despite its potential to empower communities and generate income.

Drawing on international examples, particularly from Indonesia, he encouraged the development of an online trading platform for CSO-produced goods, potentially with delivery mechanisms like scooters or drones. He noted his support for locally made products at the conference and stressed the need to expand such market access.

Mr. Hendricks also proposed reforms in how grant beneficiaries access goods. Using the example of SASSA's R250 billion annual spending, he advocated for local CSO producers to supply essential items such as water, reducing costs for beneficiaries and simultaneously supporting local economies. He noted that profit margins in retail are significant and that community-based procurement could yield major savings and impact.

Returning to the NDA's leadership, he supported the Acting CEO's call for redefining the state's engagement with civil society and reaffirmed the importance of government-CSO-private sector partnerships. He concluded by asserting that CSOs and the NDA must be at the forefront of the mission to eradicate food poverty by 2030, and expressed his appreciation for the vital work undertaken by the NDA and the broader civil society sector.

Honouring CSOs: Certificate Award Ceremony Highlights

In a heartfelt moment, the Deputy Minister of Social Development, alongside the NDA Board Chairperson and the MEC for Social Development in KwaZulu-Natal, took to the stage to honour nine exceptional Civil Society Organisations. These CSOs, drawn from each province, courageously shared their stories of resilience and impact through powerful testimonials. In recognition of their unwavering dedication and bold leadership in driving change at the grassroots level, each organisation was awarded a Certificate of Appreciation. This symbolic gesture celebrated not only their bravery but also their continued commitment to uplifting communities across South Africa.



IPADTS33 Cooperative
Gauteng



Tshilimagana Agricultural Coope
Limpopo



Qalekhaya Cooperative
KwaZulu-Natal



Batho Ba Lerato
Free State



Ma Rocks Laundry Services
North West



Umsobomvu Youth Cooperative
Northern Cape



Ikhwezi Agricultural Cooperative
Mpumalanga



Mosebe Enterprise
WC



Catholic Development Centre
Eastern Cape

Vote of Thanks



MS. NOZABELO RUTH BHENGU

BOARD CHAIRPERSON - NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

The Chairperson of the Board of the National Development Agency, Ms. Ruth Bhengu, delivered the closing address of the Civil Society Organisation Conference with profound gratitude and firm resolve. She began by extending heartfelt thanks to the Department of Social Development for its responsiveness to concerns historically raised by the NDA, notably the perception of marginalisation within government structures. Ms. Bhengu acknowledged a noticeable shift in this narrative during the conference, and in particular, expressed appreciation to the Deputy Minister of Social Development, Mr. Mogamad Ganief Ebrahim Hendricks, for his leadership and support.

She also extended sincere thanks to the MEC for Social Development in KwaZulu-Natal, with whom she shared a personal connection through her prior service as Deputy Mayor of the Ugu District Municipality.

In an important ceremonial gesture, Ms. Bhengu presided over the handover of certificates to nine CSOs from different provinces, recognising their outstanding contributions and participation in the conference. These organisations were publicly acknowledged and celebrated for their commitment to community development and service delivery.

She reflected that while many strategic issues had remained unresolved for years, Mr. Buthelezi demonstrated a proactive and implementation-focused approach, engaging the Board promptly and effectively executing agreed-upon reforms. She underscored the strategic roles of the NDA Board and the Executive, stating that while the Board provides strategic direction, the Executive must focus on execution, within a framework of clear accountability.

Ms. Bhengu affirmed the Board's commitment to conclude key internal processes, including the finalisation of leadership appointments within a defined timeframe, ensuring that her tenure leaves a positive and forward-looking legacy. She reiterated that decisions should be based not only on candidates' CVs but also on their demonstrated capabilities.



Addressing the broader goals of the conference, Ms. Bhengu acknowledged all stakeholders who participated, from academia to representatives of government and civil society. She highlighted the conference's success in redefining the role of CSOs and in providing not only conceptual clarity but practical strategies for the NDA to respond to the real and urgent needs of communities.

Ms. Bhengu emphasised that knowledge remains a critical asset in addressing structural poverty. She cautioned against merely alleviating symptoms without tackling root causes, noting that poverty in South Africa was historically engineered and must therefore be deliberately dismantled. She argued that the NDA's mandate to eradicate poverty must be understood as a mission to enable communities to sustain themselves through access to employment, ownership of productive assets, and economic agency.

She cited an example of solar energy technologies and stressed that communities, as the rightful owners of natural resources, should also be the primary beneficiaries of licensing and economic opportunities. The current model of social grants paid through mainstream retail outlets, she argued, perpetuates the flow of wealth away from communities and into corporate hands. She called for a radical shift in thinking, urging the promotion of community-owned cooperatives, retail networks, and value chains that retain capital within local economies.

Ms. Bhengu also identified a prevailing lack of understanding around the concept of cooperatives. She noted that producers often supply large commercial retailers but fail to participate in the circulation of wealth. She challenged CSOs and cooperatives to reclaim underutilised community assets, including churches and public spaces, to foster local trade and circular economies.

She stressed that the NDA's turnaround strategy is premised on empowering CSOs to shift mindsets and promote economic ownership by communities, positioning the NDA as an activist, state-owned development entity. The goal, she explained, is to restructure economic power relations so that the majority no longer sustain the minority elite through exploitative capitalist systems.



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WHEELS
OF CHANGE





CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS AND KEY OUTCOMES

Conference Highlights and Key Outcomes

This section synthesises key highlights outcomes of the Civil Society Organisation Conference, summarising the most significant achievements, resolutions, and consensus points that emerged:

- **Historic Collaboration and Dialogue:** The conference itself was a milestone, bringing together government (Minister, Deputy Minister, DG, and officials), the National Development Agency, over 200 CSO representatives from all provinces, the private sector and academia in one forum. The inclusive dialogue fostered trust and set a new precedent for government-civil society partnership in addressing poverty.
- **Unified Vision and Theme:** All stakeholders rallied around the conference theme – Positioning the NDA as a thought leader in poverty eradication and amplifying CSOs as drivers of community development. There was unanimous agreement that eradicating poverty is a shared responsibility and that CSOs play a frontline role in this mission. The conference reinforced a common vision: to create a society where government and civil society work hand-in-hand, leveraging each other's strengths to uplift vulnerable communities.
- **Empowerment of Grassroots Voices:** A key highlight was the “Voices from the Ground” session, where nine community-based organisations showcased their work and impact. These testimonials brought to life the challenges and successes of grassroots development, from cooperatives creating jobs to NGOs educating youth, underscoring the tangible impact made by NDA-supported CSOs. The presence of the Minister during these presentations signalled high-level acknowledgement of grassroots contributions. The powerful personal stories not only inspired delegates but also directly informed the recommendations (e.g., highlighting the need for market access and enterprise support, which were later addressed in Commission 4).
- **Keynote Policy Directions:** The Keynote Address by Minister Nokuzola Tolashe was a cornerstone outcome, as it outlined the government's policy agenda in alignment with conference deliberations. She emphasised the following:
 1. **The impending Integrated Anti-Poverty Strategy:** CSOs to input on this coordinated national approach to poverty reduction.
 2. **Government commitment to strengthen NDA and civil society:** She pledged the Ministry's support and oversight to ensure the success of the implementation of the NDA turnaround Strategy.
 3. **Policy support for CSO initiatives:** Enabling policies like land reform and social protection expansion as part of the solution matrix, to give a supportive policy environment backdrop to the conference's action points.

This keynote effectively bridged conference outcomes with government policy, ensuring relevance and uptake of ideas at the national level.

Conference Highlights and Key Outcomes

- **Commission Resolutions:** Four thematic commissions generated detailed recommendations, which were formally adopted as conference resolutions. Key outcomes from commissions include:
 1. **NDA Grants & Capacity:** Optimise NDA grant impact through better targeting, larger and flexible funding, rigorous M&E, and post-funding support.
 2. **Partnerships & Resources:** Establish a Multi-Stakeholder Partnership Forum and pursue innovative financing (corporate, international, local) to scale development efforts.
 3. **Accountability & Feedback:** Form an NDA-CSO Advisory Committee to institutionalise CSO voice in NDA decisions, and implement mutual accountability mechanisms (service charters, transparency measures)
 4. **Community Enterprises:** Promote community-owned social enterprises and cooperatives as pathways to CSO sustainability, including dedicated funding and incubation for such initiatives.

These resolutions were not abstract; they came with actionable proposals and were embraced by both NDA leadership and conference delegates as priorities for immediate action.

- **Stakeholder Commitments:** A significant outcome was the concrete support pledged by external stakeholders:
 1. UNDP committed technical and possible financial support to implement conference recommendations, aligning them with SDG initiatives.
 2. Private Sector (ABSA) offered to include CSOs in their enterprise accelerator, indicating fresh corporate resources for community development.
 3. Academia (UJ) is committed to partnering on research, training, and monitoring efforts, enhancing the knowledge base and capacity for implementation.
 4. Development Finance Networks (SEDFA) offered continued collaboration on innovative financing models and impact investments for community enterprises.

These commitments effectively broaden the coalition for change, injecting resources, expertise, and networks that significantly amplify the potential impact of the conference outcomes.

- **Policy and Institutional Endorsements:** Both the Minister and Deputy Minister explicitly endorsed the conference outcomes and committed to integrating them into policy and practice. This high-level backing is a major outcome, as it means:
 1. The Department of Social Development will champion these recommendations within government, including in budgeting and inter-departmental coordination.
 2. The NDA Board and Management will treat the resolutions as a mandate, already agreeing to internal reforms like establishing the Advisory Committee, improving transparency, etc.
 3. There is an agreement to institutionalise such government-civil society dialogues regularly, which is itself a key outcome ensuring the sustainability of the partnership.

Conference Highlights and Key Outcomes

- **Concrete Next Steps Defined:** The conference delineated clear next steps (a critical outcome for accountability):
 1. Compilation and dissemination of a detailed Conference Report and Action Plan by NDA, to be completed within this quarter.
 2. The NDA is to convene and allocate responsibilities and timelines to each recommendation.
 3. Quick wins identified (e.g., forming committees, initiating a partnership forum, adjusting grant procedures in the next cycle) to maintain momentum.
 4. A follow-up mechanism to assess progress on implementation, ensuring the outcomes are tracked.

In summary, the conference did not adjourn in uncertainty; it closed with a shared understanding of who will do what by when, which is a hallmark of effective outcome-oriented gatherings.

- **Renewed Morale and Unity in Purpose:** While harder to quantify, a vital outcome was the morale boost and unity forged among participants. Many delegates noted that this was the first time in years that they felt truly heard by policymakers at a national level. The collaborative spirit exemplified by joint problem-solving in commissions and respectful listening across sectors has rejuvenated trust. This improved relationship itself is an outcome that will ease future cooperation. Attendees left as partners in a common project rather than separate actors, which bodes well for collective action post-conference.
- **Visibility and Recognition for CSO Sector:** Through media coverage and the attention of key stakeholders, the conference substantially raised the profile of civil society's role in development. The CSO sector's contributions and challenges were spotlighted at a ministerial level, likely influencing public narrative and stakeholder attitudes. This increased recognition is an outcome that can lead to more support and an enabling environment for CSOs beyond the conference.

In essence, the conference achieved a comprehensive set of outcomes, strategic alignment between CSOs and government, actionable plans for enhancing NDA and CSO effectiveness, commitments of support from wider society, and mechanisms to ensure follow-through. It transformed dialogue into a roadmap. The highlights listed above are a testament that the conference was not just a talk shop, but a working platform that produced consensus-driven solutions and the will to implement them.

Conference Appendices

Acess Supporting Documents

No	Document Title	Link	QR Code
1	Conference Concept Paper	View PDF	
2	Conference Programmes	View PDF	
3	Speakers' Biographies	View PDF	
4	Profiles of CSOs	View PDF	
5	Conference Photographs	View Conference Photos	

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