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**Speech by the Honourable Minister of Social Development, Ms.
Nokuzola Tolashe**

**National Civil Society Organizations Conference Theme:
“Positioning the NDA as a thought leader in poverty eradication
and amplifying the role of CSOs as drivers of sustainable
community development”**

Date: 8 - 9 May 2025

**Programme Director,
Chairperson and Board Members of the NDA**

The Director General of Social Development

Acting CEO and the Executive of the NDA

Acting CEO of SASSA and other Senior Managers

**Leaders and Representatives of Civil Society Organizations,
Participants from government, business, and development partners,
Distinguished guests, Ladies and gentlemen,**

Good afternoon

Chairperson of the Board (Mme Ruth) of NDA, indeed it is a great sense of pride and honour to be here. Thank you for leading us to the process of reviving this concept which has not been seen for almost 10 years by convening this conference. When I met with you and the Board last year in December, we undertook to intensify exposure of NDA and

communicate with South Africans about the mandate of the Agency. This was one of the cardinal milestones we agreed upon and today I am pleased to see that working together with the Board Members, the Acting CEO, the Management as well as the rest of the NDA collective we have delivered on this undertaking.

Convened under the banner of a cause that lies at the heart of our collective national conscience. The theme is, *“Positioning the NDA as a thought leader in poverty eradication and amplifying the role of CSOs as drivers of sustainable community development”*, captured both the urgency of our national priorities and the boldness of our aspirations of the 7th Administration of the Government of National Unity.

We meet at a time when our government has recommitted itself to tackling the triple challenges of poverty, inequality, and unemployment. These are not abstract words — they are the daily realities of a multitude of families in rural areas, townships, informal settlements, and underserved urban spaces.

The NDA’s work is directly aligned with the second pillar of the current Government’s Priorities of: *reducing poverty and addressing the high cost of living*.

In January this year, I visited some of the projects that the NDA funds in the Western Cape, I experienced a pleasant shock in realization of the NDA capability to see and feel for myself what the NDA is capable of as an agency of government that is dedicated to contribute to eradicating poverty as well as its causes . Over these two days we are going to see, feel and hear about the impact the NDA Grant Funding Programme and capacity building initiatives that have benefitted a number of CSOs. We are here to listen and hear their voices.

Ladies and Gentlemen, in isiXhosa there is a saying that says “Amaqobokazana angalala endleleni kunyembelekile”, to paraphrase this without losing the rich meaning is when women go out to make means to survive you must know things are not so good. Which is what I was informed about, in the briefing earlier that majority of CSO’s are led and established by women. Chair it is by no mistake that is the case, as the history informs us the women of this country have always been touch bearers on difficult circumstances.

That reminds me about women in 1954 under the banner of the Federation of South African Women who met and drafted the Women’s Charter. At that time already, women stood together because they carried the brunt of all the ills in society including hunger which is the case today. The charter formed the basis of the 1955 Freedom Charter. It further influenced the basis of the Bill of rights in the Constitution which has helped guide the democratic government over the last 31 years to provide services to South Africans. This is the **redistributive nature that anchored the government approach in fighting poverty.**

This phenomenon has and is still the most fundamental responsibility in a democratic government and this makes us to remember our father of the nation our first President Tata Nelson Mandela once said (**open quote**) “*Overcoming poverty is not an act of charity. It is an act of justice. It is the protection of a fundamental human rights, the right to dignity and a decent life*” (**close quote**).

Manene namanenekazi, let me remind you about **role of the NDA in a Changing South Africa.**

The National Development Agency, is an entity of government that is established by Act 108 of 1998 it reports to Parliament through the

Minister of Department of Social Development. It holds a unique and strategic position in South Africa's development ecosystem. Its legislative mandate is to contribute to the eradication of poverty and its root causes it is more vital now than ever before.

As it advances this through four critical levers:

- **Grant funding** that empowers grassroots CSOs;
- **Capacity building** that strengthens institutions and unlocks local innovation;
- **Partnership facilitation** that bridges sectors and unites resources;
- And **policy research and advocacy** that ensure our approaches are evidence-based and impactful.

Repositioning the NDA and Amplifying CSO Impact

It is significant that this conference is the first of its kind in nearly a decade. That is not a minor gap. It underscores how critical this moment is a moment for **renewal, reflection, and repositioning**.

This gathering marks the unveiling of a redefined, revitalized NDA — one that must become more visible, more effective, and more influential as a national thought leader in poverty eradication.

But let us be clear: no agency, department, or government can eradicate poverty alone. That is why we are here — to **acknowledge and amplify the role of civil society**.

You, our CSO partners, are the heartbeat of grassroots transformation. You are the trusted voices in our communities, delivering not just services, but hope, dignity, and lasting change. You are not only implementing partners — you are **co-creators of South Africa's developmental**

future. Working together we can even bring great hope to the millions of our people!

On Building a Capable Developmental State through Partnerships

This conference is about more than a policy dialogue. It is about unlocking new forms of **collaboration** between the state, civil society, private sector, and international development community. It is about building the kind of capable, ethical, and developmental state envisioned in the National Development Plan framework.

Our shared success in eradicating poverty depends on:

- Mobilising **innovative funding models**.
- Embracing **evidence-based, community-informed solutions**.
- Listening to the lived experiences and wisdom of our people.
- And ensuring **transparency and accountability** across all levels of implementation.

I am encouraged and inspired by the Board and leadership's clear, bold, and focused vision to reposition the NDA as a **high-performing, high-impact institution**, centered on the needs of the most vulnerable.

As the Ministry and the Department of Social Development, we commit:

- To Supporting the **institutional strengthening** of the NDA — improving governance, systems, and service delivery.
- Championing the agency's efforts to build **strategic partnerships**, including attracting new funding from public and private sectors and ensuring that the NDA is better enabled — **administratively and financially** — to deliver on its critical mandate.

This Turnaround Strategy is not simply an internal reform — it is a **strategic investment in South Africa's developmental infrastructure**. It positions the NDA to serve as a credible convenor, a knowledge leader, and a trusted intermediary for civil society engagement.

I therefore call on all stakeholders that are present here today — fellow departments, donors, CSOs, and development partners — to actively **support and align with this agenda for institutional renewal**.

To the NDA executive and the board, the Presidency is driving a poverty eradication strategy for the country, it is targeting game changer initiatives that will have impactful results. Under the pillar of enabling productive livelihoods and social capital and institutional development.

The comprehensive presentation by the Presidency on the country's anti-poverty strategy is a clear testimony of the government's commitment on creating economic opportunities, providing social safety nets, and strengthening the social wage. It is also my view that it presents a great opportunity for NDA to position itself as catalyst and coordinator of its' implementation. That is, Acting CEO and the executive of NDA, let us ensure they are going to leave this place singing and ensuring that NDA is taken on board as the game changer for eradicating poverty in South Africa. Let us get the Presidency to allow us to upscale all our programmes and ensure that we get funding from government as we engage with the donor funding to augment what we get.

In Conclusion: From Conference to Commitment

As we engage over the next two days, through presentations, dialogue, and collective reflection I urge us all to treat this not as a ceremonial event, but as a **working platform** for coordinated action.

Let us leave this conference with:

- Renewed energy to upscale what works, while acknowledging what did not work,
- New partnerships that are inclusive, innovative, and empowering and a shared resolve to place both the NDA and civil society at the center of South Africa's poverty eradication agenda.

Let us always ask one simple question of every policy, every strategy, and every programme: **“Does this improve the lives of our People?”**

If the answer is Yes, then we are walking in the right path.

Let us walk that path together.

I thank you. Ndiyabulela!