

THE BUSINESS- GOVERNMENT CONCLAVE

NEXEC



NEXEC

NATIONAL EXECUTIVE ECONOMIC COLLECTIVE

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Design Quarter



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This report captures the proceedings and outcomes of the Business-Government Conclave, hosted by Empowaworx in partnership with the National Executive Economic Collective (NEXEC). The Conclave brought together senior government leaders, business associations, private sector executives, youth leaders, and academics for an evening of frank dialogue and actionable commitments.

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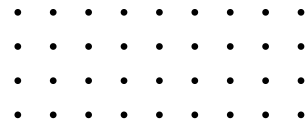
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SUMMARY



The Business–Government Conclave convened by NEXEC was a deliberate experiment in collapsing the distance between government, private sector, and young entrepreneurs. It was neither ceremonial nor symbolic. Rather, it was conceived as a working meeting — a gathering where key stakeholders could engage one another frankly on the real barriers preventing South Africa from unlocking youth-driven growth.

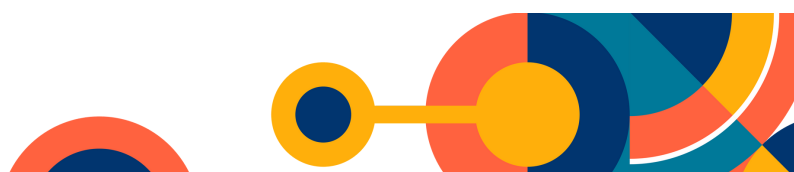
The logic behind this model builds from the Cultural–Economic Conclave earlier this year: South Africa’s challenges cannot be solved in silos, and they cannot be solved through surface engagements. What is required are forums where the distance between a Deputy Minister and a young auctioneer, or between a BMF managing director and a creative council leader, can collapse into a shared conversation about power, failure, and the possibilities for reform.

The evening’s deliberations reflected both the frustrations and aspirations of the moment. The Deputy Minister in the Presidency for Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities framed the state’s position with honesty: readiness exists, but bottlenecks persist. The Black Management Forum pushed the conversation further, exposing the failure of transformation to penetrate meaningfully into corporate structures. The panel of NEXEC leaders and young entrepreneurs demonstrated that youth are not waiting for permission to innovate — but warned that without systemic inclusion, they risk remaining marginal survivalists.

Several themes recurred: the impatience of youth, the blind spots of government and business, the superficiality of many PPPs, and the need to reframe youth not as symbolic participants but as specialists and architects of economic growth. By the time NEXEC’s Group CEO and Chairman closed the session, the message was unmistakable: South Africa’s problems demand emergency-level urgency, and only a deliberate compact between government, business, and youth will deliver transformation worth its name.

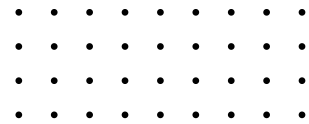
The Conclave thus served three purposes simultaneously: it was a record of truth, a platform for collective thinking, and a proof-of-concept for NEXEC’s model of brokering compacts across clusters of the economy.

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THEMATIC AREAS AND CONTRIBUTIONS



The Business–Government Youth Conclave was not a talk shop. Across keynote addresses, panel discussions, and plenary exchanges, participants consistently returned to a set of core themes that define the present condition of youth in the economy, as well as the urgent interventions required from government, business, and youth themselves

Youth Unemployment and Structural Exclusion

- **Crisis Framing:** The Deputy Minister reminded the house that youth unemployment stands above 60%, with 3.4 million young people neither in education, employment, nor training. “These are not just numbers – they are faces, lives, our peers.”
- **Systemic Barriers:** Ntobeko Cele reinforced that exclusion from finance and capital is structural, not merit-based. Without track records or collateral, young businesses are locked out of tenders, loans, and procurement systems.
- **Provincial Realities:** The Deputy Speaker of Mpumalanga highlighted missed opportunities in mining and agriculture, urging youth to “reposition [their] minds” and see hidden industries (e.g. mineral licensing, livestock by-products, cooperatives) as spaces for youth ownership.

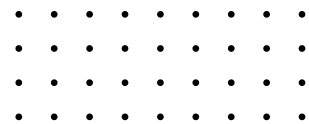
Transformation and Pushback

- **Organised Resistance:** The BMF’s Monde Ndlovu warned that “there is organised pushback, not organic pushback” against transformation. He argued that young people must be deliberate in articulating and defending transformation goals.
- **Transformation Fatigue:** Both government and BMF noted widespread fatigue and misunderstanding of transformation. Some young black South Africans now reject the term itself, leaving space for regression.
- **Ownership and Control:** A recurring theme was the need for real ownership, not tokenistic representation. The Deputy Minister cautioned against “fronting” in procurement targets, while BMF called for returning to fundamentals: ownership, management, and control.





THEMATIC AREAS AND CONTRIBUTIONS



Mentorship, Skills Transfer, and Professional Pipelines

- **Sports and Development:** Sphosethu Magudulela noted the absence of structured grassroots-to-professional pipelines in sports, particularly for township and rural youth. “Kids worry about food before sport. Without infrastructure, policies collapse.”
- **Creative Economy:** Gina Koffman emphasised mentorship for artists, with NEXEC partnering with Cliffe Dekker Hofmeyr to train creatives in contracts and financial literacy.
- **Enterprise Development:** Mxolisi Nzuza highlighted NEXEC’s NexEconomy platform, enabling youth-to-youth trade, while also stressing the importance of absorbing youth into enterprises rather than simply promising them jobs.
- **Benchmarking and Articulation:** BMF argued that young people must articulate their economic vision as strongly as leaders of past generations, warning that articulation without research is hollow.

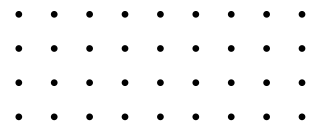
Policy and Institutional Gaps

- **Fragmentation:** The Deputy Minister acknowledged that despite multiple programmes (NYDA, Youth Employment Service, Presidential Youth Employment Initiative), efforts remain parallel rather than integrated.
- **Provincial Leverage:** The Deputy Speaker urged young people to exploit underutilised legislative spaces: “There is soft money in policy and research. How many of us understand the money that is in law-making?”
- **Research Deficits:** The BMF stressed that transformation policy is weak because it leans on others’ research. “We need to speak with authority – and authority comes from our own data.”





THEMATIC AREAS AND CONTRIBUTIONS



Public–Private Partnerships (PPP) Beyond Symbolism

- Call for Urgency: The speakers invoked the state’s ability to act decisively in crises, as in the COVID-19 pandemic. Government must exercise similar urgency in scaling youth opportunities.
- Practical PPP Models: Examples were raised of Standard Bank seconding interns into failing municipalities – solving both youth unemployment and municipal capacity shortfalls.
- Private Sector Leverage: The panel agreed that business is often faster to act than government. However, without joint frameworks, impact remains limited.

Accountability and Youth Agency

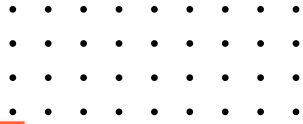
- Government Accountability: Both Deputy Minister and Deputy Speaker urged youth to hold departments accountable to procurement targets and performance plans.
- Youth Responsibility: From Gina’s community masterclasses, to Sphosethu’s grassroots sports clinics, to Cele’s emphasis on persistence, accountability was framed as a two-way street: government and business must deliver, but youth must act.
- Patience vs Urgency: The Deputy Speaker warned that professionalism “takes milestones, dedication, and patience,” but business leaders and youth panellists pushed back on patience as an excuse for bottlenecks.

Sectoral Opportunities and Industrialisation

- Green and Digital Economies: The Deputy Minister called for pathways into renewable energy, the digital sector, and 4IR. Ntobeko Cele reinforced this with NEXEC’s Green Bank concept.
- Mining and Agriculture: The Deputy Speaker argued that most South African billionaires built wealth from minerals, yet young people are absent from the sector due to licensing bottlenecks and limited training institutions.
- Cultural Economy: Gina Koffman underscored that creative industries already generate billions but remain excluded from economic planning.

From Talk to Tangible Commitments

- The Deputy Minister’s closing challenge was clear: “Enough with new laws. Enough with new regulations. What we need now is action and accountability.”
- Panellists echoed that the conclave must not remain symbolic, but drive measurable next steps – from compliance support to enterprise incubation, sports pipelines, and creative regulation.



HON. DEPUTY MINISTER MMAPASEKA STEVE LETSIKE

The Deputy Minister in the Presidency for Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities delivered a keynote address that set the tone for the evening: urgent, uncompromising, and unapologetically youth-centred. From her opening line — “Young people want energy, not dull speeches” — she made it clear that this would not be a ceremonial address but a candid conversation with the room.

The Deputy Minister underscored the scale of South Africa’s youth unemployment crisis: over 60% unemployment and 3.4 million young people neither in education, employment, nor training (NEETs). She refused to allow the audience to treat these as abstract figures: “These are not just numbers – they are faces, lives, our peers. We cannot sugarcoat this.” This candour aligned with NEXEC’s ethos of building platforms for real talk, real facts, real honesty. Her call was for platforms like the Business–Government Tank to move beyond talk-shops: “from ideas to implementation, from pilots to scale, and from parallel efforts to integration.”

The Deputy Minister acknowledged the limits of government acting alone. While citing tools such as the NYDA, the Presidential Youth Employment Initiative, and the National Youth Service, she made it clear that without business and civil society partnerships, scale will not be reached.

She named three key blindspots:

- **Fragmented accountability across departments and spheres of government, leaving youth issues stranded between mandates.**
- **Failure to match education with employment, leaving thousands of graduates without transition pathways.**
- **Over-legislation without accountability: “Enough with new laws. Enough with new regulations. What we need now is action and accountability.”**

Her remarks echoed frustrations raised later in the Tank about government bottlenecks, duplication, and slow delivery.

The Deputy Minister advanced a vision of intersectional transformation, insisting that youth opportunities cannot be delinked from gender equity, care work, or health realities:



HON. DEPUTY MINISTER MMAPASEKA STEVE LETSIKE

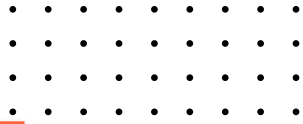
- **On women entrepreneurs:** “A young woman entrepreneur does not only need finance – she also needs markets. Without markets, there is no business.”
- **On health and safety:** crime, violence, pandemics, and non-communicable diseases are not “side issues” but structural inhibitors to economic growth.
- **On the 4IR:** South Africa must not limit itself to “coding bootcamps” but must build capacity in hardware, design, AI systems, and platform creation — positioning itself as a producer of technology, not merely a consumer.

She also reiterated the President’s procurement commitments (40% women, 30% youth, 7% persons with disabilities), with a warning against fronting: “It must be real ownership, not tokenism.”

Perhaps most strikingly, she framed the upcoming G20 Summit in South Africa (2025) as a generational opportunity: “This is not just South Africa’s moment – it is Africa’s moment. It will not return for another 20 years. How ready are we, as young people, to seize the opportunities of the G20 and ensure that we are not just spectators, but contributors?”

This was not just a rhetorical flourish — it positioned South African youth in the global context, challenging both government and business in the room to treat inclusion not as charity, but as national strategy.





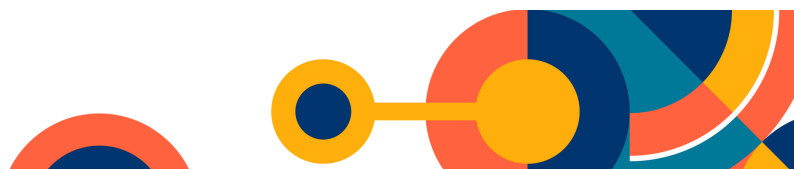
HON. DEPUTY MINISTER MMAPASEKA STEVE LETSIKE

Her intervention carried three key implications for the Business–Government Compact process:

- Youth unemployment is a crisis demanding emergency-like urgency — akin to the state’s response during COVID-19.
- Partnerships are not optional: government requires business as an active teammate, not a passive observer.
- Accountability over new policy: South Africa has no shortage of frameworks; what it lacks is follow-through.



By closing with a charge to “leave this Conclave with commitments that restore dignity, expand opportunity, and unlock the potential of millions of young South Africans,” the Deputy Minister effectively challenged every participant — government, business, and youth — to match words with tangible commitments.



HON. MR SAM MASANGO DEPUTY SPEAKER: MPUMALANGA PROVINCIAL LEGISLATURE



Hon. Sam Masango's remarks were a wide-ranging, provocative, and often personal call to action for young people to professionalise, seize overlooked opportunities, and reposition themselves within South Africa's economy. Speaking with the weight of his experience as a legislator, former provincial leader, and long-time youth development activist, he framed his contribution around one central challenge: the mindset and positioning of South Africa's youth in relation to structural opportunities that already exist.

Youth Mindset and Professionalisation

The Deputy Speaker challenged young people to stop approaching the economy as "complaining youth" and instead develop into fact-finders and solution-seekers. He argued that impatience, shortcuts, and chasing "easy, achievable things" lower the bar of youth ambition and deny them entry into serious economic spaces. In his words:

"If you don't compete with anyone, you are not inspired by anything. Life gives you a platform of opportunities — the question is, what is your target? To specialise is to professionalise. You cannot serve everything, because professionalism requires time, calculation, and networks."

This framing repositioned government not as a gatekeeper but as a tool that must be utilised strategically by organised youth actors. He repeatedly emphasised that the door is open, but it is up to youth to walk through with preparation, professionalism, and collaboration.

HON. MR SAM MASANGO DEPUTY SPEAKER: MPUMALANGA PROVINCIAL LEGISLATURE

Patience, Discipline, and Ethics

A recurring theme in Hon. Masango's speech was the need for patience and discipline in pursuing business opportunities. He spoke personally of his own sacrifices — avoiding distractions like smoking or drinking — to compete in high-level political and business environments. His point was clear: professionalism cannot be achieved overnight; it requires "serious milestones, dedication, research, and ethics."

He also warned against unethical shortcuts and poor quality standards that undermine black-owned businesses, citing the example of a woman entrepreneur in Mpumalanga producing sanitary pads that meet national quality standards as a model of excellence.

In closing, Hon. Masango reminded the room that the purpose of the Tank was not just dialogue but tangible collaboration. He issued an invitation to NEXEC and its partners to engage Mpumalanga's provincial structures, particularly in the Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and agricultural centres under development, to unlock opportunities in mining, agriculture, and manufacturing.

"We must minimise talking. We must move to practical action. The organisers have not arranged this meeting for free of charge speeches. Here we are — utilise us effectively."

The Deputy Speaker's contribution brought three sharp interventions to the Conclave:



HON. MR SAM MASANGO DEPUTY SPEAKER: MPUMALANGA PROVINCIAL LEGISLATURE

Reframing of youth economic participation: from complaints and shortcuts to professionalism, discipline, and sectoral strategy.

Reassertion of mining and minerals as key economic battlegrounds where youth cannot afford continued absence.

Leveraging legislatures and public participation as institutional pathways for accountability, advocacy, and access to opportunities.



In essence, Hon. Masango's remarks served as both provocation and invitation. He exposed blind spots in how youth approach opportunity, while opening concrete doors through provincial structures. For NEXEC, his contribution underscored the importance of integrating provincial partners into future conclaves, and ensuring that youth-led advocacy is matched with institutional entry points and practical follow-through.

MR. MONDE NDLOVU MANAGING DIRECTOR: BLACK MANAGEMENT FORUM



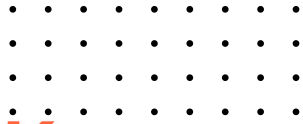
Mr. Monde Ndlovu addressed the Conclave on behalf of the Black Management Forum, situating his remarks within the broader project of transformation and the lived realities of being black in business. His contribution was candid, intellectually rigorous, and deeply historical, blending analysis of structural challenges with practical pathways for advancing economic transformation.

Transformation Under Siege

Ndlovu's central argument was that transformation in South Africa is facing deliberate, organised pushback. This is not accidental, nor organic, but systematic. He warned that vested interests are working actively to dismantle both confidence in, and the architecture of, transformation itself.

"There are people deliberately wanting to break our confidence in the project of transformation. They are teaching the next generation to push back in the same way the previous generation resisted equity."

For him, this persistence of pushback highlights the need for black institutions and youth to be equally deliberate, intentional, and consistent in shaping their agenda — meeting, strategising, and organising with the same discipline as those resisting transformation.



MR. MONDE NDLOVU MANAGING DIRECTOR: BLACK MANAGEMENT FORUM

Articulation as Power

One of Ndlovu's sharpest observations was the distinction between eloquence and articulation. Transformation, he argued, suffers from an articulation crisis. Young black South Africans are often not trained or prepared to speak about transformation clearly, factually, and without fear or favour.

"You can be eloquent and not articulate. Articulation is the ability to clearly communicate your message, factually and without fear. That is what our young people must master."

He benchmarked this against historical figures like Tsietsi Mashinini, who as a teenager could grasp and articulate the dynamics of the economy and mobilise collective action. The challenge he posed was whether today's youth are being prepared, trained, and educated to meet that level of intellectual and activist clarity.

What Transformation Really Means

Ndlovu pressed the audience to wrestle with the question: from what to what are we transforming? He observed that fatigue around the word "transformation" has set in, even among black South Africans. Alternative terms like "social justice" are used, but the goals remain the same — yet the meaning has become diluted.

He proposed reframing transformation through three perspectives:

1. **Transformation as a Science** – requiring rigorous measurement, data, and research. Without research-driven evidence, debates are dominated by others. The BMF itself, he admitted, has been absent in this space since its 2015 Transformation Barometer Report and must return to evidence-based leadership.
2. **Transformation as a Craft** – involving models, frameworks, and legislation. He reminded the audience that 60% of the Employment Equity Act drew directly from the BMF's Affirmative Action Blueprint (1993), demonstrating the power of disciplined, technical interventions



MR. MONDE NDLOVU MANAGING DIRECTOR: BLACK MANAGEMENT FORUM

3. **Transformation as an Art (Mindset)** – centred on ownership and ideology. He explained how principal shareholders — even if invisible — dictate strategy, culture, and outcomes in companies. Without ownership, black executives remain constrained, often undermined even when they hold top positions.



Black Economic Empowerment and Misconceptions

Ndlovu countered common myths about BEE, particularly that it only benefitted a political elite. He cited research on ownership transactions, showing that billions of rands in value were created for ordinary black South Africans through employee share schemes. Standard Bank's scheme, for instance, enabled staff to pay off debts, school fees, and housing bonds.

"It is a myth that empowerment only enriched a few. Employee share schemes put real value into black households. But because we don't own the data, we don't tell these stories with authority."

Enterprise and Supplier Development (ESD) Failures

Turning to contemporary challenges, he critiqued how ESD funds are often outsourced to third-party companies with little regard for sustainability. Millions of rands are spent without impact because investments are not directed towards high-impact, job-creating sectors.

He called for ESD to be reimagined as an economic driver, focused on sectors that solve unemployment, poverty, and inequality. He warned that unless black institutions reclaim this terrain, others will continue to siphon off transformation budgets without accountability.

Skills and the Future Economy

Finally, Ndlovu emphasised the skills pipeline as a critical site of transformation. He noted that less than 5% of Africans in South Africa hold postgraduate qualifications, and fewer than 30% of students graduate successfully. This weakens the pipeline of critical professions —



accountants, actuaries, engineers, bankers, and economists — all essential for future competitiveness.

Significance of the Contribution

Mr. Ndlovu's intervention was both sobering and constructive. He reminded the Conclave that transformation is not abstract; it is technical, political, and ideological. His contribution underscored:

- The urgency of reclaiming transformation discourse from those who resist it.
- The need for evidence-based authority through research and measurement.
- The centrality of ownership and principal shareholder ideology in shaping corporate culture.
- The opportunity to retool ESD and skills development for systemic economic impact.

His remarks reaffirmed the role of institutions like BMF, NEXEC, and their partners in ensuring transformation remains both defensible and actionable — rooted in data, clarity, and a bold ownership mindset.



BMF
DEVELOPING MANAGERIAL
LEADERSHIP





NEXEC YOUTH ENGAGEMENT PANEL

The Youth Engagement Panel was a flagship session of the Conclave, designed to confront barriers to youth integration in both private and public sectors and to demonstrate how NEXEC's subcouncil model creates specialised pathways for impact. The panel featured four voices from across NEXEC's leadership:

- **Ntobeko Cele – EVP: Finance & Business, NEXEC**
- **Gina Koffman – Leader, NEXEC Arts and Creative Council (NARC)**
- **Sphosethu Magudulela – Leader, Athletic Development Subcouncil**
- **Mxolisi Nzuza – Director of Enterprise Development, NEXEC**

The discussion was moderated to move from systemic barriers to practical interventions, highlighting both the challenges young people face and the innovative strategies already being pioneered by NEXEC.



The panellists began by situating their work in the broader youth economy.

- Ntobeko Cele emphasised his role as a bridge between finance and entrepreneurship: “My role is to ensure young entrepreneurs have access to sustainable models, compliance support, and the advisory capacity often missing when they try to step into competitive markets.”
- Gina Koffman foregrounded the creative economy: “Our work at NARC is about advocating for inclusion, labour protection, and recognising that creative industries are not marginal, but central to the economy.”



- Sphosethu Magudulela drew attention to sport and wellness: “We are building pathways from grassroots sports to professionalisation – developing infrastructure, creating opportunities, and enabling young people to self-actualise through sports.”
- Mxolisi Nzuza reflected on enterprise challenges: “Compliance is a huge barrier. Youth businesses are expected to meet the same standards as corporates. That is why NEXEC is developing initiatives like NexEconomy, where youth enterprises can trade with one another.”

Systemic Barriers to Youth Participation

Each sector revealed its own structural exclusions:

- Finance & Enterprise (Cele, Nzuza) – Entrepreneurs are locked out of finance because of lack of credit histories or upfront capital. “It’s a structural exclusion – not based on ability, but on history,” said Cele. Nzuza reinforced that compliance requirements replicate these exclusions, preventing small youth firms from entering supply chains.
- Creative Economy (Koffman) – Exploitation and precarity dominate: “Contracts are often exploitative, with no labour protection. Artists are treated as freelancers, stripped of rights and recognition.”
- Sports (Magudulela) – Infrastructure and subsistence challenges block pathways: “At grassroots level, kids worry about food before sport. Schools lack coaches. Even NGOs with capacity can’t access resources.”

The conclusion was unanimous: youth exclusion is systemic, not individual.

Mentorship and Skills Transfer

The panel explored mentorship as both relational and structural.

- Koffman spoke to financial literacy for artists: “We’ve partnered with CDH to teach first-generation artists the business of artistry – building pipelines of financial and legal literacy.”



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- Magudulela stressed inequity in exposure: “Elite schools give coaching certificates early. Township kids reach university without any structured pathways. Mentorship must bridge this divide.”
 - Cele positioned capital as mentorship: “We are pioneering a Green Bank with the PIC to fund youth-led green enterprises. That’s mentorship through investment.”

Policy, Collaboration, and Accountability

When asked how to strengthen collaboration between youth, business, and government, the panel gave candid responses:

- Cele: “We are already collaborating with CIGFARO to absorb youth into government finance roles. That’s how talk becomes structure.”
- Magudulela: “The private sector is often easier to engage than government. Accountability is weak, and grassroots organisations are sidelined. Youth see this clearly.”
- Koffman: “We’ve lost too many artists – because systems failed them. That’s why we are establishing an Artists’ Rights Desk to push for royalties and regulation.”
- Nzuza: “Accountability means training and absorbing youth into enterprises, not just promising them jobs.”

On youth voices in policy, all panellists stressed the need for participation beyond consultations. As Magudulela put it: “Policies exist, but corruption persists, and youth voices are absent from implementation.”

Audience members pressed on whether entertainment could realistically drive GDP growth. Koffman replied:

“The cultural economy is already making billions, but without transparency, regulation, and financial literacy, its impact is hidden. Creatives must also take accountability, while government must integrate the sector into budgets.”

The moderator concluded the session:

“Colleagues, we have heard clearly: barriers exist, but so do pathways. From finance to culture, from sport to enterprise, the youth economy is not a side conversation – it is South Africa’s future.”

The panel was met with warm applause, underscoring both urgency and alignment on the need for joint action.



AUDIENCE PROFILE AND STAKEHOLDERS

The success and credibility of the Conclave lay not only in its content but also in the calibre and diversity of its participants. The audience represented a cross-section of South Africa's economic and governance ecosystem, ensuring that discussions were not held in a vacuum but in a context rich with perspectives and influence.

- **Government:** Senior representation included the Deputy Minister of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, the Deputy Speaker of the Mpumalanga Legislature, and representatives from key national and provincial departments. Their presence lent political weight and demonstrated an openness to hear youth and business perspectives.
- **Business Associations:** The participation of BUSA and the Black Management Forum signalled the institutional commitment of organised business to engage directly on issues of transformation and youth participation.
- **Financial Sector:** Standard Bank, represented at senior executive level, brought perspectives on commercial banking and the urgent need for financial institutions to support enterprise development and employment creation.
- **State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs):** Key executives from Eskom (Group Executive: Renewables) and the South African National Petroleum Company (SANPC) joined the dialogue, offering insights into the role of SOEs in driving structural inclusion.
- **Private Sector Executives:** Leaders from Drizit Spill Tech, Grinaker LTA, KM Petroleum and other firms contributed to discussions on private sector innovation, responsibility, and the potential of partnerships with youth enterprises.
- **Youth Organisations:** Representation from youth participants across sectors, alongside NEXEC's subcouncils (spanning enterprise development, creative industries, athletics, and more), ensured that the voices of young people were central rather than peripheral.
- **Academia & Civil Society:** Scholars and thought leaders, including representatives from Wits Business School, as well as leaders from the cultural and creative economy, anchored the discussion in evidence and broader societal imperatives.

This strategically curated audience created legitimacy for the Conclave, widened perspectives, and grounded commitments in the realities of South Africa's economic and social landscape. It demonstrated, in practice, that the most pressing issues of youth integration, transformation, and enterprise cannot be resolved in silos but demand deliberate multi-sectoral collaboration.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW



The Business–Government Conclave followed a carefully curated programme designed to move beyond ceremonial speeches and into substantive, interactive engagement. Under the guidance of Programme Director Ms Remoneilwe Diale, the sequence of events unfolded with precision and purpose:

- **Opening and Welcome:** Ms Diale set the tone by outlining the objectives of the Conclave and inviting reflections on why collaboration between youth, government, and business cannot be delayed. A word from the sponsors Empowaworx, acknowledged those who made the gathering possible.
- **Deputy Minister’s Address:** The Deputy Minister of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities delivered a candid and energetic contribution. She spoke on government blindspots, the urgency of action, and government’s readiness to partner with business and youth constituencies in a more direct, accountable manner.
- **Business Contributions:** Representatives from BUSA and the Black Management Forum (BMF) offered institutional perspectives on transformation, business–government relations, and the gaps that continue to hinder economic inclusion.
- **Interactive Session – “Round of Hands”:** Participants were invited to share initial reflections in a short, democratic format that encouraged openness and diversity of voices.
- **Youth Engagement Panel:** Featuring leaders from NEXEC’s subcouncils, the panel addressed systemic barriers to youth participation in business and government, pathways for mentorship and skills transfer, policy blindspots, and concrete ideas for a joint action plan.
- **Open Floor Contributions:** Executives from state-owned enterprises, financial institutions, and private companies added their voices, reflecting on their roles in youth inclusion and the broader transformation agenda.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

- The Hot Seat: A rotating seat where a government representative, youth entrepreneur, and business leader each answered sharp, timed questions from the audience.
- The Missing Chair: A symbolic exercise that placed an empty chair at the front of the room to represent the absent voices of unemployed youth, informal traders, and rural entrepreneurs, sparking reflections on how to include these constituencies.
- Reflections from CIGFARO: Contributions focused on financial accountability in government, and the need for banking and financial institutions to think innovatively about youth enterprise financing.
- Closing Remarks: The NEXEC Group CEO closed the programme with a challenge to both government and business, emphasising the urgency of a new compact and positioning NEXEC as a bridge-builder across the economic clusters it represents.

The deliberate blend of structured contributions and interactive formats allowed the Conclave to strike a balance between authority and dialogue, ensuring that ideas generated were grounded in both lived experience and institutional knowledge



CLOSING REMARKS MATOTI BUTHELEZI, GROUP CEO & CHAIRMAN, NEXEC

The closing address by the Group CEO was both reflective and directive, framing the Conclave as a turning point for government–business–youth collaboration. His remarks highlighted systemic silos, challenged notions of patience, and urged stakeholders to shift from “force” to “work.”

Key Themes

1. Breaking Silos in Governance and Delivery

Mr. Buthelezi began with an anecdote about hosting leaders from different levels of government — a Minister, a Premier, and a Councillor — who were surprised to see one another in the same space. This illustrated the fragmentation within government structures themselves. He argued that if government cannot overcome its own silos, integrated delivery across society is impossible.

2. Challenging the Language of “Patience”

A recurring theme was the state’s call for young people to be patient. The CEO challenged this as an unfair expectation, noting that youth have already complied with requirements — registering businesses, acquiring qualifications, seeking opportunities — yet remain excluded. He used the example of Basketball South Africa’s under-18 team list, which only drew players from three provinces, to show systemic exclusion rather than a lack of patience.

3. From Force to Work

Borrowing from physics, he differentiated between force and work:

- Force represents energy expended — speeches, policies, and announcements.
- Work represents actual movement and outcomes.
- The Conclave, he said, must be about turning force into work: “The time for force without work is over.”

4. Why a Conclave, Not a Conference

Mr. Buthelezi stressed the intentionality of the format. A conclave is not a ceremonial summit but a purposeful space, comparable to the Catholic tradition of electing Popes. intentional and proactive.



CLOSING REMARKS

MATOTI BUTHELEZI, GROUP CEO & CHAIRMAN, NEXEC

Here, government, business, and youth must engage in a dialectical process — challenging one another honestly and practically.

5. NEXEC's Subcouncil Model

He explained NEXEC's perspective of the economy as clusters — creative, informal, student, black, care — rather than a monolith. The organisation's seven subcouncils are structured to research, advocate, and deliver end-to-end solutions: from design to implementation, from monitoring to evaluation. This positions NEXEC as a substantive partner for both state and business.

6. Government's Role as Teammate, Not Referee

Mr. Buthelezi urged government to act with the urgency it displayed during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Declaring youth unemployment an emergency, he called for the state to stop refereeing from the sidelines and step into the game as a teammate alongside business and youth.

7. Inclusion Beyond the Room

Acknowledging those absent, he reminded stakeholders of domestic workers, unemployed youth, and informal workers whose voices were not captured in the room. He called for ongoing dialogue across all provinces, ensuring that the Conclave does not become an exclusive exercise.

8. A Call to Business

The CEO closed by appealing directly to business leaders not to wait for regulatory compulsion to act. Inclusion and transformation, he argued, must be intentional and proactive.

"This was not a dinner. It was not a photo opportunity. It was a working session. And tomorrow, the work must begin."

Mr. Buthelezi's address positioned the Conclave as both a challenge and an opportunity: a moment where government, business, and youth must move beyond rhetoric to coordinated action, ensuring that young South Africans are not spectators, but central actors in the economy.



THE ROLE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF WOMEN, YOUTH AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

The Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities (DWYPD) carries a unique and essential mandate within South Africa's governance architecture. Unlike line departments with sectoral responsibilities, the DWYPD is tasked with mainstreaming, advocacy, oversight, and accountability across all spheres of government and society. Its work is not confined to a single portfolio—it cuts across every policy, budget, and programme, ensuring that women, young people, and persons with disabilities are not marginalised, but fully included in South Africa's socio-economic transformation.

Within Government

- **Policy Mainstreaming:** DWYPD ensures that gender, youth, and disability considerations are integrated into the policies, budgets, and programmes of every department and state entity.
- **Monitoring & Evaluation:** The Department assesses how effectively government commitments—such as the 40% set-aside for women-owned businesses, 30% for youth-owned enterprises, and 7% for disability-led enterprises—are being met in practice.
- **Advocacy & Accountability:** By raising blind spots and bottlenecks, the Department helps drive urgency across the state machinery, ensuring that transformation is not symbolic, but material.

Beyond Government

- **Civil Society Partnerships:** DWYPD engages with advocacy groups, NGOs, and community leaders to amplify voices often left at the margins.
- **Business & Private Sector:** The Department acts as a bridge, aligning corporate South Africa with national transformation priorities, ensuring that commitments go beyond compliance to genuine empowerment.
- **Youth, Women & Disability Movements:** It provides legitimacy and a policy anchor for grassroots struggles, linking lived experiences to systemic change.



NEXEC recognises the DWYPD as a central ally in the struggle for inclusive growth. We pledge to:

- **Support its mandate by providing youth-driven research, policy proposals, and monitoring tools that strengthen the Department's oversight.**
- **Partner on implementation, using NEXEC's subcouncils and enterprises to operationalise transformation priorities in practice.**
- **Amplify its advocacy, ensuring that the Department's voice is not isolated within government but reinforced by organised youth, business, and civil society.**

For NEXEC, the Department is not a peripheral actor. It is a vital player in ensuring that South Africa's economy recognises every voice, every community, and every contribution. In pledging our collaboration, we affirm that transformation is not optional—it is a shared responsibility.



women, youth & persons with disabilities

Department:
Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA





Acknowledgement & Pledge to Empowaworx

The National Executive Economic Collective (NEXEC) extends its profound gratitude to Empowaworx for hosting this Business–Government Conclave, and for creating a space where dialogue is not just ceremonial, but catalytic. The convening power of Empowaworx has once again reminded us that transformation requires platforms that bring together diverse voices and compel honest engagement.

Empowaworx is an ecosystem builder—through EmpowaYouth, EmpowaWomen, EmpowaMen, and other verticals, it nurtures spaces where possibility is matched with structure, and where underrepresented communities are given the tools to lead. These platforms do not stand in isolation; they reinforce one another, creating a fabric of empowerment that is holistic, intersectional, and sustainable.

NEXEC recognises the critical role Empowaworx plays in advancing socio-economic inclusion. We pledge to:

- **Support and amplify Empowaworx’s platforms, ensuring that their impact resonates across industries and communities.**
- **Cross-collaborate, aligning our subcouncils with Empowaworx initiatives so that each gains strength from the other.**
- **Invest in continuity, ensuring that the energy generated in forums such as this conclave translates into long-term partnerships, projects, and outcomes.**

As we close this convening, we reaffirm that NEXEC and Empowaworx are not parallel actors, but partners in purpose—committed to building an economy where empowerment is not symbolic, but lived daily by women, youth, men, and persons with disabilities across South Africa.



THANK YOU



The National Executive Economic Collective (NEXEC) extends its deepest gratitude to all who contributed to the Business-Government Conclave. We thank the Deputy Minister of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities HON. DEPUTY MINISTER MMAPASEKA STEVE LETSIKE, the Deputy Speaker of the Mpumalanga Legislature Hon. Sam Masango, the Black Management Forum, BUSA, Grinaker LTA, Drizit, KM Petroleum, and other public and private sector leaders for their presence and candour.

We especially acknowledge the youth leaders, entrepreneurs, and NEXEC subcouncil representatives whose insights shaped the day into a genuine working session. Your voices and commitments are the foundation upon which this process must continue.

This Conclave was not an end, but a beginning. Thank you for helping us prove that South Africa's youth are not spectators, but central actors in building a shared economic future.



women, youth &
persons with disabilities

Department:
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