



ANC PARLIAMENTARY Caucus

Newsletter.

JUN 2025

COMBATING SUBSTANCE ABUSE AMONG YOUTH: A FIGHT WE CANNOT AFFORD TO LOSE

There's a corner in almost every township where the scent of lost potential hangs in the air. A place at where boys once played soccer, now sits quiet, marked by smoke and silence. Where hope used to live, addiction now makes its home. This is the front line of South Africa's hidden war, the fight against substance abuse among young people.

At the heart of it lies a painful reality. In many communities, nyaope is cheaper than bread. When hunger meets despair, the high becomes a form of escape. It offers numbness where life has offered nothing else.



Cde IM Mbiyo

Lerato, 22, wanted to become a nurse. She worked hard at school and looked after her younger siblings while her mother worked shifts. But life tightened around her. Her bursary application went unanswered. Her part-time job

ended. At home, the stress grew. She smoked once, just to feel lighter. Then again. Before long, the habit took over. "It didn't start as addiction," she says. "It started because I needed to escape." She is one of many.

A 2024 study shows that over a third of South African youth have used substances in the past year. Alcohol, cannabis, and nyaope are the most common. But behind these numbers are stories, school uniforms that hang unused, young bodies lost to overdose, families quietly grieving futures that never arrived.

Substance abuse is not a personal failure. It is a sign of something much deeper.

It started because I needed to escape.

Poverty, loneliness, trauma, and a lack of mental health care make it easier for young people to turn to drugs. In some communities, the support simply doesn't exist. There are no youth centres. Clinics are understaffed. Schools are overwhelmed.

We cannot respond with shame or punishment. Combating this crisis means creating alternatives that feel real and reachable. Young people need spaces where they are seen and supported. Schools should offer counselling and access to youth mentors. There should be safe places to go after class, opportunities to learn skills, and someone to talk to who doesn't judge.

Treatment must also be part of the plan. The COSUP programme in Tshwane shows that recovery is possible. It offers methadone, therapy, food support, and job help. It doesn't wait for people to hit rock bottom. It meets them



where they are.

Most importantly, young people must help shape the response. They know what's happening on the ground. Their voices should guide what gets built and how it works.

The ANC Youth League and other organisations must make this struggle a priority. It is not enough to talk about transformation while young people are being lost to addiction. Combating substance abuse is about more

than survival. It's about giving young people a future they can believe in.

Lerato is clean now. She's back in school. She still feels the pull sometimes, but she's holding on. "What saved me," she says, "was someone who didn't give up on me."

That is what this moment demands, that we do not give up on a generation that still wants to live, love, and build. This is our work. And we must do it now.

AGENDA 2063 AND THE AFRICAN YOUTH CHARTER: ADDRESSING YOUTH CHALLENGES IN SOUTH AFRICA

S Every year, during the month of June we celebrate and honour the valorous and avidity character of the youth. We celebrate this month drawing from the gallant actions of the 1976 youth, who took to the street to challenge and confront the brutal Apartheid system that sought to consolidate its reign through the introduction of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction. Forty Nine years later it is fitting that we reflect on some of the instrumental frameworks enacted to propel youth development in South Africa and Africa at large.

The youth population in Africa, especially in South Africa, represents both a critical asset and a demographic challenge. As the African Union (AU) strives to build a prosperous and integrated continent, frameworks such as Agenda 2063 and the



Cde JK Maimela

African Youth Charter (AYC) have been established to guide this transformation. These documents emphasize the importance of youth empowerment, participation, and inclusion in all aspects of development. This article explores the relevance of Agenda 2063 and the African Youth Charter to the issues affecting South African youth, highlighting key challenges and policy responses.

Agenda 2063, adopted in 2015, is a strategic framework for the socio-economic transformation of Africa over 50 years. It identifies seven aspirations, of which Aspiration 1 - A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development, and Aspiration 6 - "An Africa whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth" - directly addresses youth issues (African Union Commission, 2015). Similarly, the African Youth Charter, adopted in 2006, is a legal and political document that recognizes the rights, duties, and freedoms of African youth (African Union, 2006). It outlines commitments by member states to empower youth in areas such as education, employment, health, and political participation.

One of the most pressing challenges facing youth in South Africa is high unemployment. As



of 2024, the youth unemployment rate remains above 50 percent, disproportionately affecting those aged 15–34 (StatsSA, 2024). A mismatch between education outcomes and labour market needs exacerbates this structural issue. Agenda 2063 advocates for inclusive economic growth and decent job creation (AUC, 2015), while the Youth Charter guarantees the right to gainful employment and protection from economic exploitation. Government initiatives, such as the Youth Employment Service (YES) and the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA), have made strides; however, structural reforms in the economy and education system are needed urgently.

The legacy of apartheid continues to affect the quality of education in South Africa. Many schools in rural and township areas

Agenda 2063 and the African Youth Charter present comprehensive frameworks to guide youth empowerment and sustainable development in South Africa

lack resources, skilled teachers, and adequate infrastructure. Although South Africa has achieved near-universal access to basic education, the quality and equity of that education remain a challenge. Agenda 2063 calls for a “well-educated and skilled

citizenry underpinned by science, technology, and innovation”. The African Youth Charter asserts the right to education at all levels and emphasizes the role of technical and vocational education in addressing youth unemployment.

Mental health issues and substance abuse are rising among South African youth, driven by poverty, unemployment, and social isolation. Limited mental health infrastructure and social stigma prevent many young people from seeking help. The Youth Charter affirms the right to health and access to youth-friendly services, including mental health support. Agenda 2063 underscores the importance of health as part of human development and promotes investment in health infrastructure and services (AUC, 2015). Greater integration of mental health into school and



actualisation of the Africa youth Charter and Agenda 2063 are urgent. We need to Scale up youth employment programs linked to sectors like green energy, tech, and agriculture. We must urgently transform education to be more equitable and relevant to the job market. We ought to Invest in mental health services and school-based support systems and Strengthen GBV prevention through legal reforms and public education. Further we must create youth councils and digital platforms for engagement in policymaking. Bridging the digital divide through free internet zones and device subsidies is essential.

Agenda 2063 and the African Youth Charter present comprehensive frameworks to guide youth empowerment and sustainable development in South Africa. Huge strides have been made to mitigate the apartheid legacy challenges. However, significant challenges remain in areas such as unemployment, education, mental health, GBV, political inclusion, and digital access. Addressing these issues requires coordinated efforts from the government, civil society, the private sector, and youth themselves. By enhancing our alignment of national policies with these continental frameworks, South Africa can harness the demographic dividend and build a more inclusive, equitable, and prosperous society.

community programs is essential. Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is a severe threat to the safety and well-being of young women in South Africa. Statistics indicate that one in three women has experienced physical or sexual violence (UN Women, 2023). This undermines gender equality and restricts the social and economic potential of young women. The African Youth Charter condemns all forms of violence and calls for protection from harmful cultural practices. Agenda 2063 promotes gender equality as a cross-cutting issue in all aspirations, particularly through Aspiration.

Despite their demographic weight, South African youth are underrepresented in political institutions and decision-making processes. Voter apathy among youth is rising, and youth voices are often marginalized in policy debates. The Youth Charter guarantees the right of youth to participate in all levels of

decision-making. Agenda 2063 calls for democratic governance and increased inclusion of young people in political processes. Platforms such as youth parliaments and youth councils must be strengthened to ensure meaningful engagement.

Access to digital tools and the internet remains unequal, especially in rural areas. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted disparities in e-learning and remote work capabilities. Digital exclusion limits opportunities for education, employment, and innovation. Agenda 2063 envisions an Africa integrated into the global digital economy. The African Youth Charter promotes access to information and technology to bridge inequality gaps. Investment in affordable broadband and digital literacy is essential for inclusive development.

Initiatives towards the

NATIONAL YOUTH SERVICE AS A CATALYST FOR SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP AMONG SOUTH AFRICAN YOUTH

Picture this: September 10, 1944. A small group of young visionaries

Anton Lembede, A.P. Mda, Jordan Ngubane, Nelson Mandela, and Oliver Tambo gathered with nothing but unwavering determination and a revolutionary dream. They refused to accept a future shaped by oppression and inequality. Instead, they founded the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL), lighting a fire that would burn through decades of struggle and ultimately transform a nation. Today, as we observe Youth Month, that same revolutionary spirit pulses through the veins of South Africa's young generation. The question is not whether they have the power to change the world it is whether they will seize the moment to do so.

Anton Lembede's words echo through time with startling relevance "A man may gain the highest university degrees and diplomas, but he is not better than a well-trained and industrious



Cde Y Govana

farmer or carpenter". In a society obsessed with credentials, this statement strikes at the heart of what truly matters the dignity of all work and the potential that lies within every young person, regardless of their educational background.

This philosophy is not just historical rhetoric, it is the foundation upon which South Africa's National Youth Service (NYS) stands today. The NYS represents more than a government program it is a bold declaration that every young South African, from the townships to the

suburbs, has something invaluable to contribute to the nation's future. Under the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention (PYEI), the National Youth Service has been revitalized as a powerful weapon against unemployment and social exclusion. For young South Africans aged 18 to 35, this is not just another opportunity it is a lifeline that transforms potential into purpose.

The National Youth Service bridges the dangerous gap between classroom learning and workplace demands. Through strategic placements across critical sectors healthcare, education, environmental management, and community development participants don't just gain skills, they gain the confidence that comes from making a real difference in their communities.

But here is what makes this revolutionary, participants develop both technical expertise and the interpersonal skills that employers desperately seek. They are not just learning to

National Youth Service



do a job, they are learning to lead, to innovate, and to solve the complex challenges facing modern South Africa.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution is not coming, it is here, and it is reshaping everything we know about work, innovation, and economic opportunity. The government and its partners understand this seismic shift and are committed to weaving digital literacy and innovation into the very fabric of the National Youth Service. This is not about keeping up with global trends, it is about positioning South African youth as the architects of tomorrow's economy one driven by technology, creativity, and inclusive growth. Every young person who enters the NYS today emerges not just job-ready, but future-ready.

Make no mistake, we stand at a crossroads in South African history. The decisions we make today about youth empowerment will determine whether we achieve Vision 2030 and successfully implement the next phase of South Africa's National Development Plan. The energy, insight, and leadership of our youth are not nice-to-have additions to our national strategy, they are essential. Without

them, we cannot succeed. With them, we can build the united, prosperous, and inclusive nation that has always been our dream.

To every young South African reading this your moment has arrived. This is not just another government initiative or political promise. This is your invitation to join a movement that stretches back to those brave youth leaders of 1944 and extends forward to the South Africa your children will inherit.

The National Youth Service offers you more than employment readiness it offers you the chance to develop an unshakeable sense of responsibility, pride, and belonging that will fuel nation-building for generations to come. When you serve through the NYS, you're not just building your resume; you're building your country.

Every challenge facing South Africa today unemployment, inequality, social division requires the fresh perspective and relentless energy that only youth can provide. You have the power to organize, engage, and ensure your voices are heard. You are not bystanders in this transformation; you are the builders, the leaders, the future.

As we invest in the growth and

leadership of our youth through the National Youth Service, we are making the most important investment possible we are investing in South Africa itself. Every young person who rises to answer this call, who chooses to learn, serve, and lead with courage and conviction, brings us one step closer to the nation we know we can become.

The revolutionary spirit that ignited the ANCYL in 1944 did not die with liberation it evolved, and today it lives in every young South African ready to serve their community and lead their nation. The National Youth Service isn't just a program; it's a catalyst that transforms dreams into community action and potential into national progress.

Asijiki. We move forward, together.

The future of South Africa depends on the choices its youth make today. The National Youth Service stands ready to transform those choices into the skills, experience, and leadership our nation desperately needs. The question is not whether change is possible it is whether you are ready to be the one who creates it•

NAVIGATING MENTAL ISSUES AND BUILDING RESILIENCE FOR YOUTH IN A CHANGING WORLD

The state of youth mental health is a pressing concern society today.

As young people navigate the challenges of adolescence and early adulthood, issues such as anxiety, depression, and stress significantly impact their well-being. South African youth are frequently exposed to repeat traumatic events and toxic stress, stemming from factors such as poverty, violence, and systemic inequalities. Recent reports and studies have shown a dramatic rise in the number of young people experiencing mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts. These are commonly found to be caused by high rate of unemployment and Gender based violence that is very high in this country.

Even though the above mental health issues have been found common in our societies, there is still a lot of stigma surrounds mental illness in general. Mental health issues are often seen as a sign of weakness and inability to manage emotions. In many parts of the country, especially in rural areas, there is still

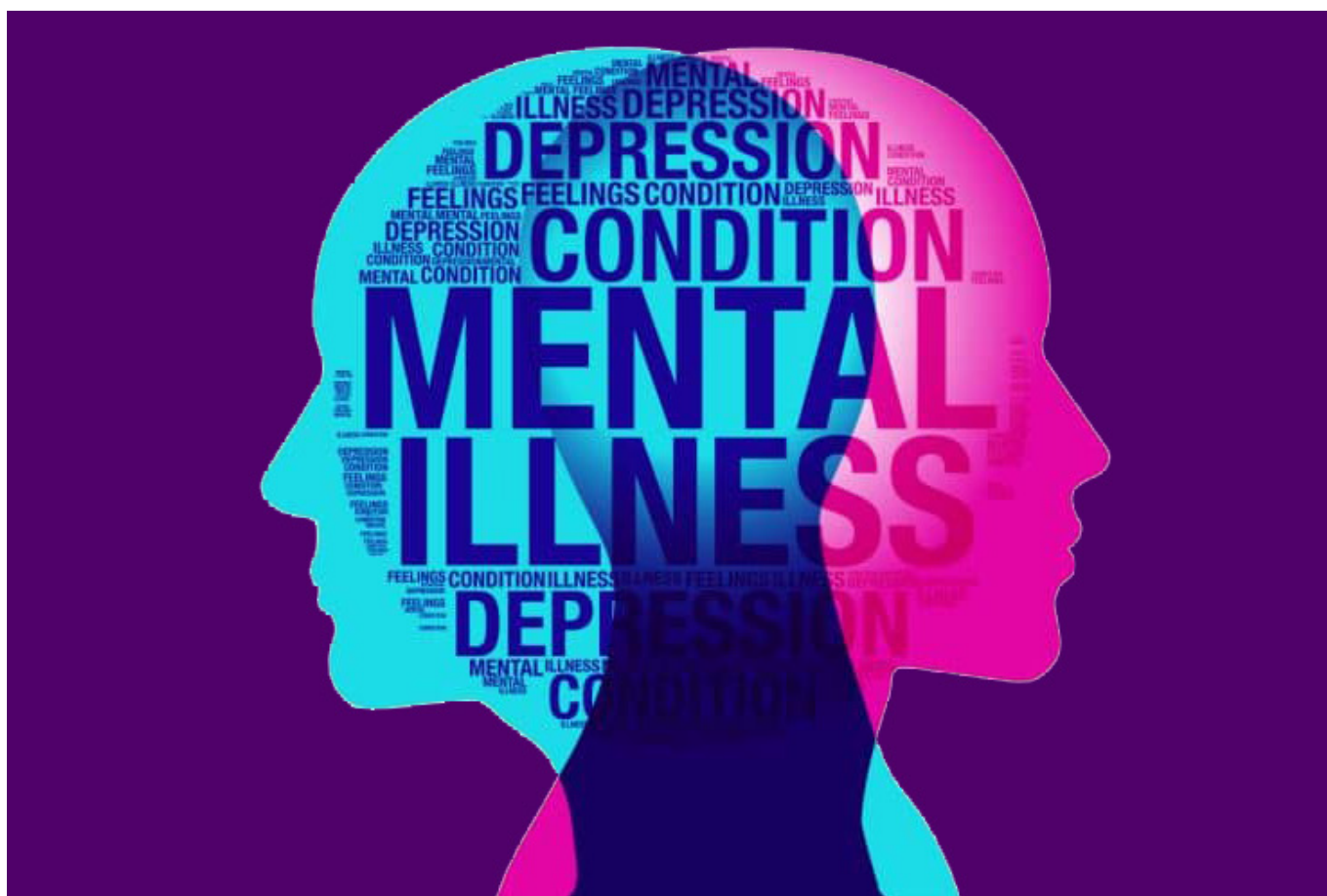


Cde LB Sapo

cultural reluctance to discuss emotions in many communities and this prevent young people from seeking help. This silence is particularly pronounced in families where mental health awareness is low, and talking about feelings or seeking therapy is either dismissed or misunderstood. It's no surprise, then, that many young people struggle in isolation, unable to reach out for the support they so desperately need.

However, even though mental health was once stigmatised and overlooked, it has now reached a point where it can no longer be ignored as the numbers of

young people who commit suicide increases. The question is no longer whether mental health problems exist in South Africa's youth but rather how we, as a society, can take meaningful action to address and reverse this growing crisis. Mental disorders generally require a multi-disciplinary approach with all relevant stakeholders such as family members, teachers, psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers. These stakeholders help to manage mental health issues and ensure that those who seek help receive help without compromising the principle of confidentiality. It is for that reason that it is important to treat each condition differently so that correct references can be made. There is no doubt that government has set up all necessary systems to address mental health issues with the assistance of Non-Profit Organisations in this country. Community awareness campaigns have been rolled out in rural areas, townships and urban areas in efforts to educate young people about mental health and available resources thereof. However, these services remain underutilized by young people. Instead, young people have found substance



abuse as a way to escape to confront their challenges. The abuse of drugs and abuse of alcohol is common in our rural areas and townships where drugs are sold to young people. Unfortunately, the abuse of alcohol has negatively impacted the lives of young people, leading to teenage pregnancy in some cases, violent acts such as destruction to property, injuring oneself or others and committing criminal acts whilst under the influence.

Developing mechanisms to fight mental health issues is not enough without making efforts to deal with the root cause. Young people must be equipped with the skills and resources to cope

with challenges and bounce back from adversity. This can be achieved by fostering positive thinking, building strong social connections, practicing self-care, setting realistic goals, and developing problem-solving skills. Furthermore, young people must be also equipped with tools to navigate the pressure of the modern world, particularly in terms of social media. Digital literacy programs that teach the realities of online spaces and the importance of mental well-being could be a vital resource in helping young people manage their online presence and negativity.

Government must create opportunities for young people to guide them to change their lives

and that of their families. Young people must participate fully in the economy by being supported to establish their business and ultimately create jobs. The government must implement red tape reduction initiatives to enable young people with SMMEs and improve their business skills. Young people must no longer wait for jobs but must create jobs through being innovative. However, without the support of government and progressive public- private partnerships such initiatives will never be realized. Young people are no longer requesting a seat at the table; they are already at the table and therefore, they must be engaged to solve challenges that affect them •

FROM PROTEST TO PROGRESS: THE EVOLVING ROLE OF SOUTH AFRICAN YOUTH IN SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Social and economic development denotes the enhancement of a population's standard of living through elements such as wealth distribution, social differentiation, and industrial transformations. The contribution of youth to nation-building is to offer fresh perspective and vigour to facilitate economic advancement and social improvement.

Introduction

According to the 2024 Mid-year Population Estimates, approximately 21 million young people account for 33.1% of the country's population, underscoring their significant role in shaping the nation's social and economic landscape. The youth of South Africa have long been the heartbeat of change, driving social and economic progress with their passion, creativity, and resilience. From the streets of Soweto to the halls of parliament, young people have played a pivotal role in shaping the country's future.



Cde N Maduna

This article tells the story of the evolving role of South African youth in social and economic development, highlighting their struggles, triumphs, and potential for future growth.

The Legacy of Protest

The 1976 Soweto Uprising marked a turning point in South Africa's history, as young people took to the streets to protest against the apartheid regime's inferior education system. The bravery and determination of these

young protesters paved the way for the country's transition to democracy. Today, the legacy of this protest lives on, inspiring a new generation of young South Africans to demand justice, equality, and accountability.

Contemporary Contributions

South African youth are making significant contributions to social and economic development, driving innovation, entrepreneurship, and social change. Many are:

- **Education and Youth Development:** Over the past decade, education trends have shown gradual improvements in both school and higher education attendance. From 2014 to 2023, youth school attendance rose slightly from 74.7% to 75.2%.
- **Entrepreneurs:** Young entrepreneurs are starting new businesses that drive innovation and job creation, often in the face of significant challenges and obstacles.

- **Activists:** Advocating for social justice and human rights, using their voices to amplify the concerns of marginalized communities.
- **Leaders:** Holding positions of influence in government, civil society, and the private sector, shaping policy and driving progress.

Challenges and Opportunities

Despite their potential, South African youth face numerous challenges, including:

- **Unemployment:** According to the Q1 2025 Labour Force Survey, the unemployment rate among young people aged 15-34 is 46.1%, while youth aged 15-24 is 62.4%.
- **Education:** education remains a crucial factor in employment outcomes. The share of unemployed young people without a matric qualification dropped from 77.2% in 2014 to 70.0% in 2024. The number of young people who were not in employment, education, or training reached 43.2% in 2024.
- **Inequality:** Persistent social and economic inequality, with young people from disadvantaged backgrounds facing significant barriers to opportunity.

The Power of Storytelling

The stories of South African youth are a testament to their resilience, creativity, and determination. From the young entrepreneur who started a successful business in a township to the activist who mobilized a community around a social cause, these stories inspire



and motivate. By sharing these stories, we can:

- **Amplify their voices:** Give young people a platform to share their experiences and perspectives.
- **Inspire others:** Motivate young people to pursue their passions and make a difference.
- **Drive change:** Use storytelling as a tool for social change, highlighting the challenges and opportunities facing South African youth.
- **Unlocking Potential**
- To unlock the potential of South African youth, it is essential to:
- **Invest in education:** Improve access to quality education and skills development, focusing on STEM fields and vocational training.
- **Support entrepreneurship:** Encourage and support young entrepreneurs, providing access to funding, mentorship, and networks.

- **Foster leadership:** Develop leadership skills and opportunities for young people, empowering them to drive change and progress.

Conclusion

Social and economic development is a practice by which the economic welfare and human well-being can be improved in a variety of which includes their quality of life, education standard, income, food, level of employment, skills and behaviour. The South African youth are the country's greatest asset, driving social and economic progress with their energy, creativity, and passion. They are an essential part of the present. Their participation in social and economic development is essential to building a world that is sustainable, just and affluent. Therefore, it is imperative to recognize the valuable contributions of young people and provide them with the support and opportunities they need to thrive. •

IBRAHIM TRAORÉ'S LEADERSHIP: SYMBOL OF CHANGE OR CONTROVERSIAL REVOLUTION FOR AFRICAN YOUTH?

Born on 14 March 1988, Captain Ibrahim Traoré became the leader of Burkina Faso in September 2022 after a coup d'état that removed the interim president, Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba. Traoré's rise as a prominent and articulate thirty-something revolutionary leader has ignited substantial debate about his relevance to African youth, making him either a symbol of bold transformation or a controversial military ruler. We need to talk about Captain Traoré's impact in a more nuanced way. We need to look at his policies, speeches, and actions in the bigger picture of African politics, taking into account the hopes and challenges of young people on the continent.

Ibrahim Traoré appeals to millions of young people in Africa and the African diaspora who are frustrated with their governments, which they think are corrupt and unresponsive to their needs. Young Africans want



to get away from neo-colonial rulers who depend on the former colonial powers, especially the French, British and Americans, for security, investment and trade. They have been drawn to Traoré's focus on Pan-Africanism and calls for self-reliance. Hence, he has had multiple attempts on his life and, most recently, survived a military coup that was said to have been planned in one of his neighbouring countries.

ECOWAS is a threat to stability

Traoré's rule has been criticised, especially by other West African countries. The ties between ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States), Burkina Faso, and the two nations in the Sahel Region that are ruled by military officers—Mali and Niger—have gotten worse. ECOWAS put harsh sanctions on several of these countries, including closing their borders and suspending the assets of their central banks, to force them to relinquish power to civilian governments. Many African people and progressives around the world criticised ECOWAS for being like an Uncle Tom for the West in Africa. In January of this year, the three nations left ECOWAS and started the Alliance of Sahel States (AES). This group was set up as a mutual defence pact and is aiming towards economic integration in the region.

Echoes of Sankara

Millions of young Africans regard Traoré's achievements in a few years as a chance to move on from



youth see that their countries have not been able to reach their development goals mainly because of their dependence on Western governments and institutions. The rise of social media and easier access to information have also given young Africans the power to speak up and be more active and involved.

Traoré as a Figure of a Controversial Revolution

Some people also see Traoré's leadership as a sign of a controversial revolution. These analysts claim that they are worried that democratic institutions are weakening and that authoritarianism could rise. His initial takeover of power via a military coup d'état is regarded as setting a precedent that undermines the advancement and entrenchment of constitutional governance and the normative commitment to the rule of law in the area.

Conclusion

The recent string of coups in Africa has exposed the fragility of African democracies. Many African countries have enacted constitutions that support democratic values and institutions, but these ideas have become hollow. This is because political elites routinely line their pockets with public money while millions of rural and urban populations live in dehumanising poverty. In light of this, the emergence of leaders like Traoré raises important issues about the survival of Western-style democracy in Africa and that military takeovers of government can be seen as justified or even essential.

the past and make a new path for the continent. Many have compared him to Thomas Sankara, another youthful revolutionary leader of the Burkinabe nation who was assassinated in 1987 at the behest of the West, after four impactful years as head of state. Many people who are tired of corruption and self-serving governments admire Traoré's focus on patriotism, living simply, and honesty. People see his ability to get young people involved in shaping the future of their country as a positive development.

The sociopolitical issues in many African countries make Traoré's influence on young people even stronger. Ibrahim Traoré is a threat to the status quo, and African youth are becoming more suspicious of the existing political systems. A lot of young Africans are unhappy with their governments because they have

not kept their promises about economic growth, social justice, and political inclusion. In this context, Traoré's message of anti-imperialism, self-determination, and a fresh focus on African solutions to African problems resonates. Some people see his efforts, such as nationalising important economic sectors, opening processing plants for agricultural produce and beneficiating the minerals of his country, as getting back control of the country and ensuring that its resources benefit its people. Additionally, Traoré's attempts to include young people in decision-making positions are perceived as a break from the past.

Ibrahim Traoré's appeal is based on a rejection of Western-style "democratic" leadership methods and a desire to bring back traditional Ubuntu values, which stress community, compassion, and interconnectivity. The

LEADERSHIP IN THE FIGHT AGAINST CRIME AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa's struggle with crime and gender-based violence is a pressing concern that demands collective action from all sectors of society. As we strive to build a safer and more just nation, it is crucial that leaders emerge to champion this cause. Youth, in particular, have a vital role to play in shaping the future of our country, and empowering them with the necessary knowledge, skills, and support is essential to effective leadership.

The statistics on crime and gender-based violence in South Africa are staggering. Women and children are disproportionately affected, with one in five women likely to experience physical or sexual violence in their lifetime. The impact of these crimes is far-reaching, causing irreparable harm to individuals, families, and communities. It is imperative that we take a zero-tolerance approach to these crimes and work towards creating a society that values the dignity and safety of all individuals.



Cde EA Cloete

Effective leadership is the backbone of any successful campaign against crime and gender-based violence. Leaders have the power to inspire, mobilize, and advocate for change. They can drive policy reforms, support initiatives that prevent and respond to these crimes, and foster a culture of accountability. In South Africa, we need leaders who are courageous, empathetic, and committed to creating a better future for all.

The youth of South Africa are a powerful force for change. By empowering them with the knowledge, skills, and support

they need, we can unlock their potential to become effective leaders in their communities. Youth leaders can play a critical role in:

- Raising awareness about the devastating impact of crime and gender-based violence
- Mobilizing their peers to take action and demand change
- Advocating for policy reforms that support the prevention and response to these crimes
- Providing support and resources to survivors of crime and gender-based violence

Conclusion

The fight against crime and gender-based violence requires strong leadership and collective action. As we strive to build a safer and more just society, it is essential that we empower youth leaders and support initiatives that prevent and respond to these crimes. Together, we can create a brighter future for South Africa, where every individual can live with dignity and safety.

BOOK REVIEW

Cde Saul Pelle

BREAKTHROUGH

The Struggles and Secret Talks that Brought Apartheid South Africa to the Negotiating Table

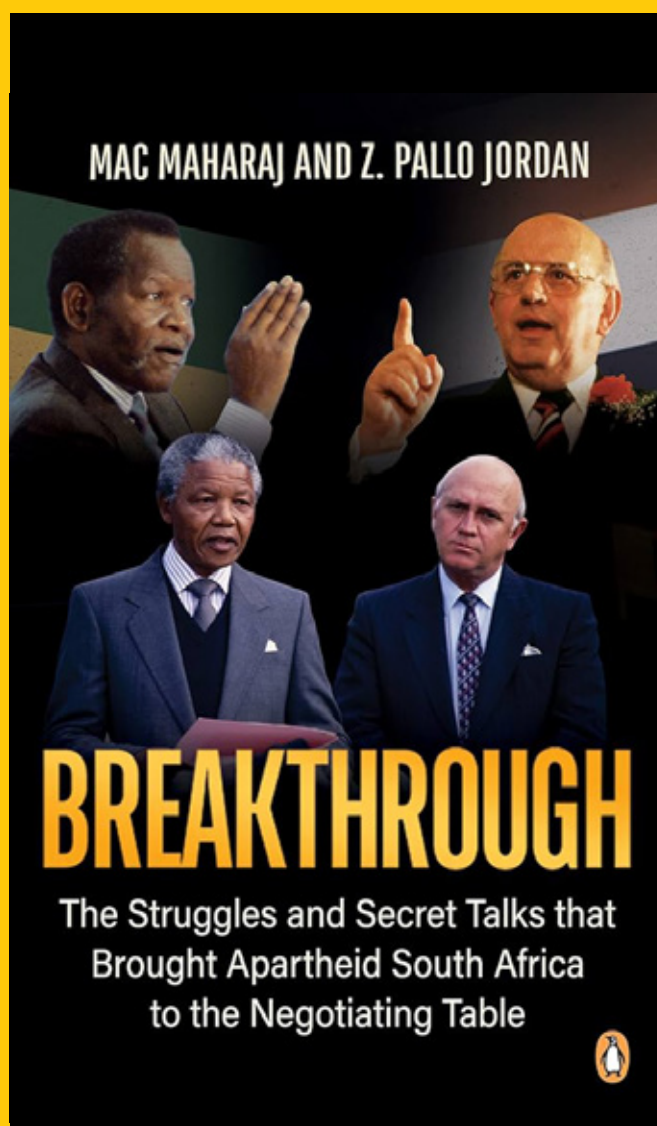
By Mac Maharaj and Z Pallo Jordan.

"We who were outlaws not so long ago, have today been given the rare privilege to be host to the nations of the world on our own soil. We thank all of our distinguished international guests for having come to take possession with the people of our country of what is, after all, a common victory for justice, for peace, for human dignity. We have, at last, achieved our political emancipation. We pledge ourselves to liberate all our people from the continuing bondage of poverty, deprivation, suffering, gender and other discrimination."

Nelson Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom



his truly fascinating book documents "the often slow but nevertheless inexorable political process by which the ANC gained the upper hand in the bitter contest with the apartheid National



Party government.” The above quote from Mandela represents the birth of a united, non-racial, non-sexist, democratic, prosperous and democratic South Africa, free from the vestiges of a painful past.

The book focuses on a crucial time in our history, (the last kick of a dying horse), the political process between 1980 to 1990 that led to negotiations. While most accounts of South Africa’s transition to democracy deal with what happened during negotiations, *Breakthrough*, as the title suggests, demonstrates how the opposing parties reached the negotiating table. This is indispensable for an understanding of how South Africa broke free from a spiralling war and began a journey to democracy.

Drawing from material in the prison files of Nelson Mandela, minutes of the meetings of the ANC Constitution Committee (see last month’s edition on this committee), the ANC National Working Committee and the NEC notes about the Mells Park talks led by Professor Willie Esterhuyse and Thabo Mbeki, communication between OR Tambo and Operation Vula, the Kobie Coetsee papers, the Broederbond archives and numerous other sources, the authors have pieced together a definitive account of these historic developments.

Of particular significance is that whereas the apartheid leaders had convinced themselves that there was a ‘Chinese wall’, between the thinking of the ANC leadership in exile and those in prison like Nelson

Mandela, the opposite turned out to be true. Little did they know that the ANC, in its wisdom, created a secret line of communication which ensured that the left and right hand were in sync, especially on the issue of negotiations. Examples related to this assertion abound.

“The ‘Mandela document’ as his 1989 memo to Botha became known, is the most unambiguous indication of what Mandela set out to achieve when he began to engage with the regime. It adheres to the explanation he gave to a concerned OR Tambo when the latter smuggled a message into jail asking him what he was up to behind those prison walls. (‘A meeting between the ANC and the government’, was Mandela’s curt response.)

On another occasion, “the talks with Cotsee ...had reached a point where both sides understood the core issues that negotiations would address. However, by this time Tambo had secretly briefed Mandela about what later came to be known as the Harare Declaration.” This document, adopted on 21 August 1989 by the OAU (precursor to the African Union) Ad hoc subcommittee on southern Africa at its summit in Harare, Zimbabwe, urged the apartheid regime ‘to take measures to create a climate for negotiations to put an end to apartheid and define a new constitutional order based on democratic principles.”

This book, written by two renowned authors and veterans of the struggle who were close to these events, has pieced together a definitive account of these historic developments.

Mac Maharaj has been active in the struggle since 1953. He was co-opted to the Revolutionary Council and its successor, the Politico-Military Council. Zwelidinga Pallo Jordan became active in politics at an early age. He was appointed head of Radio Freedom and was later deployed as director of information and publicity. Through this book, both struggle stalwarts have been central in the work of the ANC, seeking with their fellow comrades to replace racist authoritarianism with non-racial democracy. In putting pen to paper, they shed new light on the process that led to formal negotiations.

This 224-page treasure trove includes three important documents which encapsulate the process that led to formal negotiations:

- i. Memo from Nelson Mandela to PW Botha – a prelude to their meeting. It was given to Minister Kobie Cotsee to hand over to Botha sometime in April 1989. Mandela sent a copy to OR Tambo, who was the president of the ANC. It deals with a range of issues which include Obstacles to Negotiations, Negotiated Political Settlement, and his view to overcome the then deadlock.
- ii. Constitutional Guidelines for a Democratic South Africa – Discussion paper published by the ANC, and,
- iii. Harare Declaration – Declaration of the OAU Ad-hoc Committee on South Africa on the question of South Africa.

This book, a must read, was published in 2021 by Penguin Random House South Africa •