

https://dspace.org/

16 June 1976, half a century later: where are the youth?

Fotoyi, Asanda; Dlakavu, Ayabulela

2026
University of the Witwatersrand
https://hdl.handle.net/10539/50055
Fotoyi, A. & Dlakavu, A. (2026). 16 June 1976, half a century later: where are the youth? September. University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, https://hdl.handle.net/10539/50055.

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

WITS SCHOOL OF GOVERNANCE
UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

SOUTH AFRICAN YOUTH COUNCIL

APRM
African Peer Review Mechanism

16 JUNE 1976, HALF A CENTURY LATER: WHERE ARE THE YOUTH?

SEMINAR REPORT

2026

Prepared by
Asanda Fotoyi
Ayabulela Dlakavu

ABOUT THIS REPORT



This report summarises the key contributions, insights and discussions arising from the seminar themed "16 June 1976, Half A Century Later: Where Are The Youth?"

The seminar was hosted by the University of the Witwatersrand School of Governance (WSG) and the South African Youth Council (SAYC), in collaboration with the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) Secretariat. The event was held on 12 June 2026 at WSG Donald Gordon Auditorium, from 14:30 - 17:30

The seminar brought together youth leaders, academics, students, learners, activists, policymakers, youth structures, and practitioners. The engagements helped to connect the legacy of 1976 with the realities facing young people today, across Africa.

This report was prepared by:
Dr Asanda Fotoyi, Wits School of Governance.
asanda.fotoyi@wits.ac.za http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9246-0471

Dr Ayabulela Dlakavu, Wits School of Governance.
ayabulela.dlakavu@wits.ac.za http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9740-6298

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the young people, youth leaders, academics, students, learners, activists, policymakers, youth structures and practitioners for their participation and for sharing their knowledge, experiences and perspectives as the seminar reflected on 50 years since the 1976 Soweto Youth Uprising.

We also thank all the organisers and individuals who contributed to the success of the seminar.

We would like to express gratitude to Professor Adebayo Olukoshi (Wits School of Governance) for his support which contributed to the success of the seminar.

A special thank you goes to the seminar speakers for leading the conversation:

- Mr Lennon Monyae (African Peer Review Mechanism) for directing the programme.
- Professor Themba Maseko (Wits School of Governance) for the welcoming remarks.
- Mr Thabo Tsheme (President of the South African Youth Council, 6th National Executive Committee) for the keynote address.
- Professor Sifiso Mxolisi Ndlovu (UNISA and Thabo Mbeki Foundation) and Mr Ntsikayohlanga Azania Mzananda (African Minds for Applied Research Institute) for the intergenerational dialogue.
- Ms Lutfiyya Dean (Wits School of Governance Student and Pan-African Collective for Evidence) for moderating the panel discussion.
- Mr Gilbert Nchabeleng (President of the 104th Wits Student Representative Council), Ms Anele Simon (AfCTA Youth Advisory Council), Mr Senzo Mbonambi (Lead Change Organisation), and Ms Adela Ndlovu (Youth Development Co-Lab) for the panel discussion.
- Dr Ayabulela Dlakavu (Wits School of Governance) for the closing remarks.

We also give special acknowledgement to Mr Theroshen Naidoo (African Peer Review Mechanism) and Ms Camerodene-June Buys (Wits School of Governance Student) for taking detailed notes during the seminar. These notes were used as a reference point for compiling this report.

We would like to express our appreciation to the APRM and ShotsByMr&Mrs photography teams for providing professional photography services during the seminar.

We also extend gratitude to Dr Zimkhitha Manyana (Wits School of Social Sciences) and Dr Thandiwe Matthews (Wits School of Governance) for taking the time to read the report and provide valuable feedback.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The seminar reflected on the 16 June 1976 Soweto Youth Uprising and the legacy of youth activism. It also considered whether the aspirations of the South African Constitution and the African Youth Charter have translated into meaningful opportunities for the youth of 2026. The discussions situated the events of 16 June 1976 within a long history of organised youth and student movements. From the 1940s to 1994, youth structures were critical in shaping political education among young people and accelerated the transition towards democracy. The emphasis was that young people have historically been agents of political and social change.

Meaningful access to education emerged as the bridge between 1976 and 2026. While access to higher education has expanded since 1994, it was argued that access alone is not sufficient. Education must be equitable, affordable, decolonial, inclusive and responsive. It should cultivate critical thinking and consciousness. It must also prepare young people to participate meaningfully in governance, the economy and societal renewal. The seminar further distinguished between youth representation and actual decision-making power. Highlighting that tokenistic participation, political apathy, corruption and patronage continue to marginalise young people's influence in spaces of power. Thus, meaningful youth participation requires institutional arrangements that place young people at the centre of leadership, governance, institution building and civic participation.

Economic exclusion was identified as the most pressing challenge confronting the youth of 2026. The high levels of unemployment not only perpetuate poverty and inequality, but also prevent the potential of a youth dividend. Structural barriers also limit youth entrepreneurship and enterprise development. Therefore, frameworks such as BBBEE and AfCFTA need to translate more effectively into tangible opportunities through access to capital, markets, business skills and development, and regional economic networks.

The discussions also highlighted that young women and men, young people with disabilities, queer youth, youth in different geographical spaces and those in the informal sectors experience society differently. Young people also face compounding social challenges including mental health, gender-based violence, substance abuse, climate change, digital exclusion and the declining availability of safe community spaces. Thus, inclusive planning and context-specific interventions need to be integral rather than peripheral components of policy and systems design. However, the seminar positioned young people not merely as beneficiaries but as leaders of today, shaping the future of Africa. As agents of Africa's political, economic and social transformation, there was a call for stronger coordination among youth organisations. Greater youth involvement in institution-building and renewal was also emphasised.

Overall, the seminar aligned with SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) particularly Target 16.7. This reflects its focus on meaningful education, youth economic participation, inclusive development, and the strengthening of youth voice and agency.

Keywords: 16 June 1976; Soweto Youth Uprising; Youth Activism; African Youth Charter; Youth Development.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

01 Introduction

02 Historical reflections on youth and student activism

03 Education as the bridge between 1976 and 2026

04 Youth participation in democracy and governance

05 The struggle for youth economic participation

06 Differing youth experiences and social challenges

07 Youth as leaders of today, shaping the future of Africa

08 Concluding remarks

09 Appendix A: Youth and Student Movements 1940s-1994

11 Appendix B: Keynote Address “Legacy of Youth Activism and Its Influence on Policymaking, Governance, and the Economy in the Democratic Era”

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AfCFTA	African Continental Free Trade Area
ANCYL	African National Congress Youth League
APRM	African Peer Review Mechanism
ASA	African Students' Association
BBBEE	Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
NEC	National Executive Committee
NEET	Not in Employment, Education or Training
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
QLFS	Quarterly Labour Force Survey
SASM	South African Student Movement
SASO	South African Student Organisation
SAYC	South African Youth Council
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SRC	Student Representative Council
SSRC	Soweto Student Representative Council
TEFSA	Tertiary Education Fund of South Africa
UN	United Nations
UNISA	University of South Africa
WSG	Wits School of Governance

1. INTRODUCTION

The year 2026 marks 50 years since 16 June 1976, when black pupils protested against the imperialistic policy of imposing Afrikaans and English as the sole languages of instruction in South African schools. This language policy continued the colonial and apartheid legacy of marginalising the native majority groups.



What began as a demonstration by Soweto students against the Department of Bantu Education in Booysens, Johannesburg, ended in a deadly confrontation with the South African Police.[1] The civic duty to resist an education policy devoid of fairness and representation marked a turning point in the struggle for freedom for the majority black South Africans.

Significantly, 2026 also marks the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the African Youth Charter by the African Union. Adopted in 2006, the Charter represents a continental commitment to recognising young people as key agents of development, governance, peacebuilding and socio-economic transformation across Africa



The aim of the seminar was to reflect on the events of 16 June 1976, the legacy of youth activism, and its influence on the trajectory of South African history. The seminar also sought to take stock of youth influence on policymaking, governance, and the economy in the democratic era, while critically assessing the extent to which the aspirations embodied in the South African Constitution and the African Youth Charter have translated into meaningful opportunities and participation for young people in South Africa and across the continent.

The seminar addressed a range of interconnected issues relating to the experiences, challenges, and aspirations of young people in 2026. Key themes included the historical reflections of youth activism, meaningful access to education, youth participation in democracy and governance, the ongoing struggle for economic participation, differing youth experiences, and the role of young people in shaping Africa's future.



These themes provided a framework for synthesising the seminar proceedings and capturing the key points that emerged from the discussions.

[1] Ndlovu, S. M. (Ed.). (2017). The anatomy of the crowd (Chapter 2). In The Soweto Uprisings: New Perspectives, Commemorations and Memorialisations (The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Vol. 7). South African Democracy Education Trust.

2. HISTORICAL REFLECTIONS ON YOUTH AND STUDENT ACTIVISM

The seminar began by locating the 16 June 1976 Soweto Youth Uprising within a long history of youth and student activism in South Africa. From the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL) to the African Students' Association (ASA), South African Student Organisation (SASO), South African Student Movement (SASM), and Soweto Student Representative Council (SSRC), these structures were critical in shaping political education among young people and inspire student activism.[2] As a result, these movements transformed schools and universities into important centres of resistance against the apartheid system.

This was a reminder that the 1976 Soweto Youth Uprising cannot be viewed as an isolated event, it emerged from a long history of organised youth and student movements. However, the Soweto Uprising had a particular significance because it re-ignited what had become a dormant liberation struggle following the detention, murder, and exile of numerous anti-Apartheid activists. The Soweto Youth Uprising also garnered international support, including from the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and the United Nations (UN). It therefore served as a strategic turning point in South African history and helped accelerate the transition towards democracy.

The main takeaway was the importance of reflecting on how previous generations organised themselves in response to the challenges of their times. The 1976 youth understood their circumstances and their responsibility for political emancipation. Therefore, young people today need to define their own historical mission as they confront the unfinished systemic and structural transformation facing South Africa's political economy. History indicates that this requires a coordinated and organised effort by young people across educational institutions, businesses and corporates, the public sector, civil society and local communities.





[2] Refer to appendix A for a detailed account of the youth and student movements 1940s to 1994.

3. EDUCATION AS THE BRIDGE BETWEEN 1976 AND 2026



The seminar viewed meaningful access to education as the bridge between the legacy of 1976 and the realities of 2026. Whereas the 1976 generation confronted the use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in schools, which served as a systemic barrier to educational attainment for the black youth majority. The Rhodes Must Fall and Fees Must Fall movements continued the struggle for equitable and transformative education, demonstrating the enduring exclusive nature of education along the lines of affordability and decoloniality. Undoubtedly, education remains a contested space between hegemonic curricula and the need for decolonised education systems that must enable young people to develop competitive skills in the 21st century, premised on knowledge, innovation, and technology.

Although access to education has expanded since 1994, aided by key funding mechanisms such as the Tertiary Education Fund of South Africa (TEFSA, 1991-1999) and the modern-day National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), which have opened the doors of higher education and learning to millions of deserving yet disadvantaged young people. However, it was noted that access alone is insufficient if it does not bring dignity. As such, learning environments must be inclusive, affordable, and responsive to the evolving realities of young people

The key consensus point was that 50 years since the 1976 Soweto Youth Uprising, access to quality and equitable education remains a challenge that young people must confront boldly. Furthermore, for education to be meaningful, it must go beyond pedagogical learning and cultivate critical thinking and consciousness. Ultimately, the success of the education system should be measured by how well it equips young people to engage in democratic governance, participate in the economy and foster societal renewal.



4. YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE

The seminar recognised that post-1994, opportunities for youth participation and engagement in politics, governance and civil society have increased. However, there is a need to distinguish between representation and power. Being physically present in policy-making spaces is not the same as influencing decisions on socio-economic policy, legislation and laws, and even budget allocations. As such, there is a need to address the tokenistic positions of youth in politics and governance structures. Especially because these are levers of power through which young people can begin to address their enduring marginalisation and shape a youth-centric economy, politically responsive and socially inclusive South Africa.





The discussions also highlighted that in more recent years there has been a notable increase in political apathy among young people. This is particularly evident in low voter turnout among young people. It was pointed out that corruption and patronage have fragmented youth participation and weakened youth voices, even within youth structures. These self-serving and exclusionary practices have not only eroded public trust among young people but have made them sceptical about participating in leadership positions and key governance structures. This perpetuates the marginalisation of youth in spaces of power and influence.

The key takeaway was that democratic participation cannot solely be about mobilising young people to vote during elections or inviting them into conversations without giving them meaningful influence. Meaningful participation requires the intentional centring of young people in leadership, governance systems, institution building and civic participation. Young people also have the duty to be honest and confront the corruption and patronage practices that are filtering into youth structures. This calls for young people who are self-aware, conscious, and committed to advancing the interests of all young people.

5. THE STRUGGLE FOR YOUTH ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION

The seminar agreed that the main struggle of today's youth is economic exclusion. Labour statistics highlight the difficulties many young people face in finding meaningful opportunities. For instance, at the time South Africa was commemorating half a century since the 1976 Soweto Uprising, the youth unemployment rate stood at 45.8%, while the graduate unemployment rate was 12.2%.[3] In addition, 37.6% of young people aged 15-24 were not in employment, education or training (NEET), and young people made up 51% of the country's discouraged job seekers.[3] The high levels of unemployment not only perpetuate the cycle of poverty and inequality but also prevent African economies from fully benefiting from the potential of their youth dividend.





It was also noted that the ongoing struggle for economic participation is compounded by structural barriers to entrepreneurship and enterprise development. Even South Africa's Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) Act is critiqued for having made little contribution to the economic empowerment of young people; instead, it has disproportionately benefited established elites. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) promises opportunities for expanding youth entrepreneurship, trade, and economic integration across the continent. However, it was argued that it remains a diplomatic aspiration that is yet to become an economic empowerment framework for the youth. This is particularly noteworthy because many young people are not fully aware of how it can be used practically to create work and facilitate regional trade.

The main takeaway was that the democratic transition is incomplete given the unequal access to sustainable employment opportunities, lack of enterprise support, and limited regional economic integration. Addressing these challenges requires youth development policies that are intentional about investing in young people, as well as creating an enabling environment for them to participate meaningfully in the economy. Young people are also called to view themselves not just as job seekers, but as innovators, entrepreneurs and creators of economic value. They are encouraged to position themselves for potential economic opportunities that come with frameworks such as BBBEE and AfCFTA.



[3] Statistics South Africa (Stats SA), Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 1st Quarter 2026.

6. DIFFERING YOUTH EXPERIENCES AND SOCIAL CHALLENGES





The seminar challenged the idea that "youth" represents a homogenous group. It recognised that society is shaped by the aggregate of political and economic institutions, civil society, and local communities, all of which influence young people's experiences. This was an important point of reflection because experiences differ among young women and men, young people with disabilities, queer youth, young people in different institutions and geographical spaces, and youth in the informal sectors of society. These differences are particularly evident in access, educational experiences, employment opportunities, and structures of engagement.

The discussions spotlighted the experiences of youth living with disabilities. It was noted that many policies and development programmes, including student accommodation and workspaces, were designed without considering the needs of young people with disabilities. It was argued that the inclusion of young people with disabilities must not be treated as an afterthought but should be incorporated from the outset of policymaking, infrastructure development, and institution design.
Young people also face compounding social challenges including mental health, gender-based violence (GBV), substance abuse, climate change, and the digital divide. It was argued that many of these challenges are made worse by the staggering levels of economic exclusion and the lack of access to opportunities. The closure of many community halls and the poor maintenance of recreational parks have reduced the availability of safe spaces for young people to engage positively in their communities.

The key consensus point was the need to better understand that different groups of young people experience society in different ways, particularly those living with disabilities, who are often among the most excluded groups in all forms of development planning. Therefore, the inclusion of all young people should not be an afterthought, but an entrenched principle of planning and systems design. Furthermore, the interconnected social challenges that face young people today require urgent policy responses and context-specific interventions. At the same time, young people also have the responsibility to organise and take action to make positive changes in their communities.

7. YOUTH AS LEADERS OF TODAY, SHAPING THE FUTURE OF AFRICA



The seminar positioned young people as the leaders of today, shaping the next 50 years. Emphasis was placed on understanding that Africa's future cannot be separated from its youth.

The debates underscored the need for meaningful engagement with continental frameworks such as the African Youth Charter. Although the Charter is viewed as important for youth development, it was noted that its implementation remains uneven across member states. An important question was also raised about how well the Charter responds to today's youth realities. This was underscored by the need to interrogate how adaptable the Charter is to the changing geopolitical dynamics and global economic structures, and advancements in digital integration.

Given the many socio-economic challenges faced by youth across the continent, there was a call for stronger coordination among youth organisations to advance youth interests in politics and broader societal development. Youth involvement in institution-building and renewal is also seen as critical because post-colonial institutions have not been able to respond to contemporary youth realities. The discussions also highlighted the need for honest conversations around migration, social cohesion, and the importance of protecting constitutional values while promoting African solidarity.

The key takeaway was that youth need to expand their collective influence on the political economy of African societies by engaging directly in discourse and interventions that seek to bring about social, economic and political change. Furthermore, for young people to be fully recognised as leaders of today, they need to be actively involved in decision-making, community development and economic transformation. True leadership requires young people to commit to developing African solutions to address African challenges. As the African Youth Charter states, youth "have the duty to become the custodians of their own development".



8. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Although young people contributed to the liberation of Africa, they remain on the margins of decision-making, education systems, institution building, economic participation and social inclusion. This is an anomaly given that the youth constitute the majority grouping of African demographics. Young people's continued marginalisation is therefore a source of security and sustainability concerns for Africa, as there is no socio-economic and political system that can survive when the majority constituents remain at the periphery. Social unrest, as exemplified by the Arab Spring, Fees Must Fall, and recently, anti-immigration movements, are all symptoms of a broken social compact.

Evidently, significant gaps remain across African societies in creating meaningful pathways for young people to be active participants in economic, social, and political systems necessary for building and sustaining a quality life. The growing number of unemployed graduates also calls for the interrogation of our education systems, particularly because for many young people attaining a graduate qualification represents one of the few pathways to a better quality of life.

The youth of 2026 also have a duty and responsibility to shape the African societies they want to live in and ultimately pass on to future generations. As Frantz Fanon famously stated, "each generation must, out of relative obscurity, discover its mission, fulfill it, or betray it".

As a way forward, it is important to deepen dialogue and generate evidence through research about the state of youth development across Africa. Moreover, it is critical to translate knowledge into action that places young people at the centre of leadership, governance, development and economic transformation

The seminar points to several areas requiring research and policy attention.

- First, there is a need for stronger evidence on the state of youth development across Africa, particularly evidence capable of informing practical interventions rather than merely describing youth disadvantage.
- Second, there is a need to examine the effectiveness of existing youth participation mechanisms, towards facilitating genuine decision-making power in spaces of influence.
- Third, greater research focus is required on how education and skills development influence labour-market outcomes, particularly given the persistent challenge of graduate unemployment
- Fourth, policy should move beyond viewing young people as just job seekers, and also support youth entrepreneurship, business development, access to finance, markets and regional economic opportunities.
- Finally, policy should adopt more differentiated and inclusive approaches that respond to disability, gender, geography, the informal economy, mental health, gender-based violence, digital exclusion and other intersecting social challenges.



APPENDIX A: YOUTH AND STUDENT MOVEMENTS 1940S–1994

by Prof Sifiso Mxolisi Ndlovu (UNISA & Thabo Mbeki Foundation)

Congress Youth League

- It existed in 1942 in a provincial format, played a role in adopting the acclaimed 1943 Africans' Claim policy document, and became a national body in 1944, with Anton Lembede as its leader. It included the nucleus of a remarkable generation of leaders: Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo, Walter Sisulu, Jordan Ngubane, Ellen Kuzwayo, Albertina Smith, A.P. Mda, Dan Tloome and David Bopape.
- Geopolitical issues include anti-colonial struggles; decolonisation; the Second World War and the subsequent Cold War; the apartheid state assuming power in 1948; the Defiance Campaign; the Treason Trial; the banning of the ANC; the Rivonia Trial; going into exile and the ANC Mission in exile; liberation struggles in Namibia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Angola, etc.
- Assume leadership of ANC Mission in Exile; leadership incarcerated in prison in South Africa

African Students' Association (ASA)

- The ANC student movement was founded by both the mother body and the ANC Youth League. It operated in high schools and universities. It was founded on 16 December 1961, and founding members included, among others, Ernest Galo, the first president; Thabo Mbeki; Sipho Makana; and Sindiso Mfeyana. Rival student organisations included ASUSA (Pan Africanist Congress Student Movement/Association) and the Unity Movement's Student Movement/Association. Thabo Mbeki took over as president after the untimely death of Galo.
- Geopolitical issues include anti-colonial struggle and decolonisation; Vietnam War; Algerian Revolution; banning of liberation movements in 1960; national liberation struggle; going into exile, Mandela House (for education) and Chief Luthuli House (for military struggle-uMkhonto we Sizwe recruits); liberation struggles in Namibia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Angola, etc. Participate in Wankie and Sipolilo campaigns; ANC military camps etc.
- Progressive internationalism and cosmopolitan internationalists spread across North America, Western Europe, Eastern Europe, the African continent, Asia (India), and some in Cuba. Alliance with international student organisations such as the British National Union of Students, International Union of Students, World Federation of Democratic Youth, International Federation of Socialist Youth, National Council of Swedish Youth, World Assembly of Youth, Pan-African Youth Movement.
- ASA in exile also doubled up as ANC Youth and Students' Section.

The ANC Youth League and ASA worked together. Rolihlahla Mandela requested a send-off meeting with the youth before they eventually left the country in September 1962. Thabo Mbeki recalled: "*We met him (Mandela) at a secret venue in Mayfair, where he conveyed his best wishes to the group and issued his last instruction before our departure. As part of his final instruction, he made two points to us. The first was that we were ambassadors for South Africa abroad and needed to behave properly. Secondly, he said that as one of the first groups of ANC students to study abroad, we had an immense responsibility to succeed. He said that when the struggle against apartheid was over, we would be expected to play a leading role in the process of reconstruction of post-apartheid South Africa.*"

The two groups met again at the 1969 Morogoro Conference, with Oliver Tambo now the president of the ANC. In terms of one of the resolutions, the Morogoro Conference declared that the ANC was not fighting for mere political reforms but sought a fundamental revolutionary transformation of the entire socio-economic system that sustained racism and white minority rule in South Africa. The 1969 conference emphasised that economic emancipation was at the centre of the struggle for national liberation. This was because:

"In our country, more than in any other part of the oppressed world, it is inconceivable for liberation to have meaning without the return of the wealth of the land to the rightful owners as a whole. It is, therefore, a fundamental feature of our strategy that victory must embrace more than formal political democracy. To allow the existing economic forces to retain their interests intact is to feed the root of racial supremacy and does not represent even a shadow of liberation. Our drive towards national emancipation is thus in a very real way, bound with economic emancipation…But one thing is certain – [issues about] our land and economic emancipation cannot be tackled unless the basic wealth and resources are at the disposal of the people as a whole, and are not manipulated by sections of individuals, be they white or black."

South African Student Organisation (SASO)

- Also founded in the 1960s and promoted Black Consciousness philosophy, and its prominent leader was Steve Biko.
- Leading proponents of the anti-colonial struggle and decolonization.
- As an above-ground movement, it provided much-needed leadership during the Soweto Uprisings.
- A number of its leaders went into exile.
- Geopolitical issues same as above.

South African Student Movement (SASM)

- Formed in the early 1970s, this above-ground student movement operated across various African urban areas and was influential on the Witwatersrand
- Played a prominent role in organising the 16 June 1976 student march throughout Soweto.
- Geopolitical issues same as above.
- Soweto Student Representative Council (SSRC)
- Formed in August 1976 after the 16 June 1976 student protest, it elected Tsietsi Mashinini as its founding chairperson.
- This generation of students was responsible for one of the most important turning points in South African history, leading to the democratic dispensation in 1994.
- A sizeable number of students who were part of the Soweto Uprising went into exile in their thousands, reinvigorating the ailing liberation movements
- Like the 1960s generation, some of the Soweto 76 generation went into exile and continued their education in North America, on the African continent, and in Western and Eastern Europe. Some joined the military struggle and were trained in the Soviet Union, East Germany, and Angola.
- Geopolitical issues same as above.

Soweto Student Representative Council (SSRC)

- Formed in August 1976 after the 16 June 1976 student protest, it elected Tsietsi Mashinini as its founding chairperson.
- This generation of students was responsible for one of the most important turning points in South African history, leading to the democratic dispensation in 1994.
- A sizeable number of students who were part of the Soweto Uprising went into exile in their thousands, reinvigorating the ailing liberation movements
- Like the 1960s generation, some of the Soweto 76 generation went into exile and continued their education in North America, on the African continent, and in Western and Eastern Europe. Some joined the military struggle and were trained in the Soviet Union, East Germany, and Angola.
- Geopolitical issues same as above.

Bibliography

1. A. Heffermen and N. Nieftagodien (eds.), Students Must Rise: Youth Struggle in South Africa Before and Beyond '76, (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2016).
2. S. Mkhabela, Open Earth and Black Roses, (Johannesburg: Skotaville Press, 2001)
3. S.M. Ndlovu, The Soweto Uprisings: Counter-Memories of June 1976, (Johannesburg: Picador Africa, 2017), 2nd edition.
4. South African Democracy Education Trust, The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 7, Soweto Uprisings: New Perspectives, Commemorations and Memorialisation, (Pretoria: UNISA Press, 2017)

APPENDIX B: KEYNOTE ADDRESS "LEGACY OF YOUTH ACTIVISM AND ITS INFLUENCE ON POLICYMAKING, GOVERNANCE, AND THE ECONOMY IN THE DEMOCRATIC ERA"

by Mr Thabo Tsheme (President of South African Youth Council, 6th NEC)

"Esteemed delegates, comrades, and the vibrant youth gathered here today...We gather not only to commemorate the courage of 1976, but to measure how far we have come, and how far we still must go. The legacy of youth activism is written in sacrifice, but its mandate is written in struggle. Today, we must confront the challenges of our generation with the same defiance that defined our predecessors in 1976."

Historical Struggles and Achievements.

Soweto Uprising: Youth resisted the imposition of Afrikaans, demanding dignity and access to education. Their defiance forced the apartheid regime to reckon with the power of young voices. Student Movements: From SRC leadership to the Fees Must Fall generation, youth activism reshaped education policy, securing commitments to free and decolonized education.

Democratic Transition: Youth leaders were at the forefront of negotiations, protests, and civic mobilization that dismantled apartheid and ushered in democracy.

Social Justice Campaigns: Struggles against gender-based violence, HIV/AIDS stigma, and inequality, influenced national legislation and awareness.

"These victories remind us that youth activism is not symbolic-it is transformative. It has bent the arc of history toward justice."

Challenges Faced by Today's Youth.

Unemployment Crisis: With youth unemployment rates among the highest globally, economic exclusion remains the greatest threat to our democracy.

Mental Health Struggles: Depression, anxiety, and substance abuse plague our generation, demanding urgent investment in accessible mental health services.

Gender-Based Violence: Women and girls continue to face violence and exploitation, undermining the promise of equality.

Climate Crisis: Environmental degradation and climate change threaten the future, yet youth voices are sidelined in sustainability debates.

Digital Divide: While technology drives innovation, many young people remain excluded from digital access, limiting opportunities in the modern economy.

"These are not abstract issues-they are lived realities. They demand not sympathy, but solutions."

Influence on Policymaking, Governance, and the Economy.

Policymaking: Youth struggles birthed commitments to free and decolonized education, and continue to shape debates on climate, sustainability, and digital rights.

Governance: Youth activism pressured leaders to uphold transparency and integrity, expanded democratic participation, and produced leaders who now sit in Parliament, municipalities, and civil society.

Economy: Youth unemployment remains a crisis, but activism has placed it at the centre of national discourse. Young innovators are reshaping the economy through technology, arts, and social enterprises.

"The economy cannot thrive while its largest demographic is excluded. Youth activism has made economic inclusion not optional, but imperative."

On the National Youth Act (Bill)

Comrades, the development of the National Youth Act represents a historic milestone in the struggle for youth empowerment in South Africa. For too long, our young people have been spoken about but not spoken for; this Act changes that by enhancing youth development as a matter of law, not charity.

The National Youth Act will provide a clear legislative framework to coordinate policies, institutions, and resources dedicated to the advancement of young South Africans. It will ensure that youth voices are not peripheral but central in shaping the nation's future. By institutionalizing youth development, the Act guarantees accountability, sustainability, and inclusivity in how government and society respond to the needs of our generation.

This bill is more than legislation; it is a declaration that the dreams, struggles, and aspirations of young people matter. It will strengthen our fight against unemployment, expand access to education and skills, and create pathways for youth participation in economic and social transformation.

As the South African Youth Council, we stand firmly behind this Act. We call upon all stakeholders-government, civil society, and the private sector-to rally behind its implementation. In empowering the youth, we secure the prosperity and stability of South Africa itself.

Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BEE)

Comrades, the struggle for economic freedom remains incomplete until the youth of South Africa are fully integrated into the engines of our nation's prosperity. The Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act is not merely a piece of legislation; it is a weapon in the hands of the oppressed, designed to dismantle centuries of exclusion and to open the doors of opportunity to those who have been denied.

Yet, we must be clear: empowerment cannot be symbolic. It must be lived in the daily realities of our young people. The BEE Act must be sharpened to ensure that it serves not only the few but the many. It must prioritize genuine transformation in ownership, skills development, and enterprise creation, so that the youth are not spectators but active architects of South Africa's economy.

As the South African Youth Council, we declare that our battle is not against the principle of empowerment, but against its dilution. We will not accept a BEE framework that enriches elites while leaving many young people trapped in unemployment and poverty. True empowerment must mean access to land, capital, and markets for the youth of our communities.

This seminar must resolve to defend the integrity of the BEE Act, to demand its implementation in ways that uplift the grassroots, and to ensure that every young person sees in it a pathway to dignity and prosperity. In empowering the youth, we are not only correcting the injustices of the past-we are securing the stability and future of South Africa.

Closing Call to Action.

"Comrades, the struggles of yesterday gave us democracy. The struggles of today must give us justice, inclusion, and prosperity. We must demand: Economic pathways that prioritize youth employment and entrepreneurship. Policies that guarantee mental health support as a right, not a privilege. Governance that is transparent, accountable, and inclusive of youth voices. An economy that is not extractive, but equitable-where youth are owners, not spectators."

"History will honour those who act. Let us be that generation. Let us ensure that the legacy of youth activism is not only remembered, but renewed-in every policy, in every institution, and in every corner of our economy. The time is now. The youth are here. And the struggle continues. Aluta continua.

The End



APRM
APRM







An Organ of the
African Union
WITS SCHOOL OF GOVERNANCE
APRM
African Peer Review Mechanism
An Organ of the
African Union
WITS SCHOOL OF GOVERNANCE

Caltech
1891
