



**REVISED NATIONAL YOUTH POLICY 2026-2036, AND
IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

MOTION DEBATE SPEECH

BY MINISTER OF YOUTH AND GENDER AFFAIRS

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INTRODUCTION

Madam Speaker, I rise today to present the Botswana National Youth Policy 2026–2036, a policy that is both a continuation of our national commitment to youth development and equally a decisive shift in how we structure, deliver, and account for that commitment. This policy has been formulated through extensive stakeholder consultation, bringing together the voices of young people, institutions, development partners, and communities, with the intention of designing an inclusive framework that recognises youth not as beneficiaries, but as a strategic asset in building our nation.

Before I proceed, I must pause to thank and commend all the young people who crafted this policy, young people from different walks of life, who poured their lived experiences and expectations on paper. Today, I present to this house your words, your fears, your critiques, your demands, your ambitions, your brilliant ideas, your passions, all wrapped in your work which you poured months into. I am grateful for you and to you. I take this time to acknowledge the young people in this chamber today, most of whom contribute immensely this Policy. I therefore congratulate you, as your work has finally reached the national center stage.

Madam speaker, this Policy is guided by national and global principles of youth development and is anchored in a clear objective - *to ensure that young people are positioned to participate meaningfully and sustainably in Botswana's development*. However, beyond its technical design, this policy is grounded in lived reality. It reflects the experience of a young person who has followed the prescribed path of education but cannot

access employment, the young entrepreneur whose ideas cannot scale due to limited access, not only to capital, but to enabling resources which are stifled by red tape, and the young woman whose education is disrupted by socio-economic pressures. These are not isolated cases. They are patterns, and they require deliberate and coordinated intervention.

HISTORY AND RATIONALE

Madam Speaker, Botswana's commitment to youth development has evolved through deliberate policy interventions. The 1996 National Youth Policy established the foundation by recognising youth as central to national development and expanding access to education, employment, skills training, and cultural participation. The 2010 Revised Policy built on this by advancing inclusivity and expanding youth participation across economic, social, and environmental sectors.

However, while these policies laid a necessary foundation, they have not been sufficient in addressing persistent and emerging challenges. Today's youth are more educated and more globally connected than any generation before them, yet many remain excluded from meaningful economic participation. This contradiction signals not a lack of effort from young people, but a misalignment within our systems.

Approximately 60% of Botswana's population is below the age of 35, while 35% falls within the ages of 15 to 35, presenting both an opportunity and a responsibility. This demographic reality positions Botswana to harness a demographic dividend, but only if supported by strong institutions, enforceable frameworks, and coordinated implementation. This policy

therefore builds on what has worked, addresses what has not, and aligns itself with Vision 2036, the National Development Plan 12, the Botswana Economic Transformation Program, the African Youth Charter, and the Sustainable Development Goals.

UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGE

Madam Speaker, the consultations and data that informed this policy reveal a clear and urgent picture. There is a persistent misalignment between education and labour market demands, reflected in a youth unemployment rate of 38.2% as captured in 2024. This indicates that while access to education has expanded, transition into opportunity has not kept pace.

Only 60% of learners transition to senior secondary education, with socio-economic barriers such as teenage pregnancies and early marriages disproportionately affecting young women. At the same time, despite the expansion of Technical and Vocational Education and Training, less than 10% of youth are enrolled in these programmes, limiting their ability to acquire practical and market-relevant skills.

Madam Speaker, the digital divide remains a significant constraint. ICT penetration in rural areas stands at approximately 35%, compounded by high data costs and limited digital literacy, effectively restricting access to modern economic opportunities. This means that opportunity is still determined not only by ability, but by geography.

Beyond economic and educational challenges, social vulnerabilities are increasingly evident. Substance abuse among young people is rising, mental health challenges—including anxiety and depression—are

becoming more pronounced, and young people aged 15–24 continue to account for a significant proportion of new HIV infections. Gender-based violence remains a serious concern, with 17.1% of women aged 15–49 reporting annual partner violence.

Young people with disabilities continue to face barriers to participation due to inaccessible infrastructure and persistent stigma. Justice system delays and limited outreach further constrain rehabilitation and reintegration efforts for youth in conflict with the law.

Young people continue to unite in one voice, advancing their stance on the shape Botswana ought to take, but their cries, aspirations and ideas get lost in bureaucratic channels.

Madam Speaker, these challenges are interconnected. When education does not lead to employment, frustration increases. When opportunity is limited, vulnerability grows. When young people are not co-designers of the system, misalignment widens. When systems fail to respond, trust is eroded. This policy recognises that youth development must therefore be addressed as an integrated system - one that aligns education, economic opportunity, social protection, and inclusive governance.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Madam Speaker, the expected outcomes of this Policy are the clearest expression of what Botswana is committing itself to achieve for its young people by 2036. They are not broad aspirations. They are measurable national commitments intended to shift the lived reality of youth in education, health, economic participation, leadership, inclusion, environmental governance and global competitiveness.

In **education, skills development, and innovation**, this Policy seeks to ensure that young people are equipped not merely to complete school, but to transition into meaningful opportunity. By 2029, a significant number of youth should have access to vocational training programmes aligned to market demands, while 50% should be accessing digital learning tools that strengthen employability and participation in the digital economy. By 2030, at least 60% of primary and secondary schools should offer integrated financial literacy and entrepreneurship education, with our youth further acquiring entrepreneurial and economic skills through national mentorship programmes. The Policy recognizes that technology is not separate from the economy, but rather, it is how opportunity is created. It therefore positions young people not just as users of technology, but as active participants in the digital economy by expanding access to STEAM education, and linking learning and job opportunities to projects in AI, ICT and Innovation.

Still on education and skills development, the policy recognizes the need for a strong collaboration with the private sector to guide curricula development as well as absorption rates into tertiary institutions. This is intended to ensure a seamless structure from education into the labor market. This is how we begin to close the gap between education and the economy. It is how we move from qualification without opportunity, to qualification with relevance.

The Policy is equally deliberate on inclusion within the education system. By 2029, 90% of educational curricula and teaching materials should be accessible to students with disabilities, enrolment should increase by at least 20%, and at most schools should be equipped to support diverse

learning needs. Rural youth's education will be supported through enhanced infrastructure development and adequate access to learning materials. By 2030, educators should receive skills development training on new teaching methods and systems. These commitments speak directly to whether the education system is actually capable of preparing a broad range of young people for the demands of a changing society and economy.

The Policy also recognises that youth development is not complete without **health, wellbeing, and social protection**. By 2030, substance abuse among youth should be reduced by at least 30%, supported by the establishment of at least two national rehabilitation centres, comprehensive prevention programmes across districts, and community-led support systems. It goes further by targeting a 50% reduction in relapse and new cases of youth substance abuse through local support groups led by community structures. On HIV, GBV, and SRHR, the Policy provides for integrated interventions, trained youth leaders and civil society actors, increased testing uptake, and a reduction in new infections, especially among vulnerable groups of youth. It further targets a reduction in gender-based violence among youth, alongside stronger referral pathways, safety shelters, and timely access to medical, legal, and psychosocial support through establishment of one stop centers. A functional mental health coordinating structure is to be in place by 2029 to improve service delivery, accountability, and reporting across all districts. It is critical to note that in all the above, a boy child's needs and vulnerabilities will be attended to and programmed for. These outcomes make it clear that youth empowerment cannot be reduced to jobs alone. It also requires safety, support, dignity, and resilience.

In **economic empowerment and employment**, the Policy aims to shift young people from exclusion to productivity. By 2030, at least 80% of youth completing internships and apprenticeships should transition into sustainable employment, further training, or entrepreneurship. It provides for a functional social protection scheme to strengthen unemployment protection. The policy provides for youth exchanges that expand global exposure, as well as co-working and innovation spaces in each district to support youth access to start-up infrastructure, digital resources, and remote work environments. It speaks to effective mainstreaming wherein every sector and institution systemically channels resources to the employment of youth through internal recruitment targets as well as programs aimed at strengthening youth employability. In this sense, it recognizes that the limiting factor to youth's economic advancement is not only absence of opportunities, but structural exclusion from existing opportunities. Further, the policy increases the Government procurement quota from 20% to 40% while guaranteeing structured training on procurement to enable young people to meaningfully benefit from the quota.

The Policy provides for a 40% target by 2030, of graduates of youth entrepreneurship programmes to establish registered enterprises and cooperatives, while a significant portion of youth-owned businesses should become globally competitive and export-ready. In the same breath, it speaks to enhancing access to finance by youth enterprises, not only for startup, but as well as upscaling capital. Revision of existing enterprise funding initiatives to be more inclusive of youth needs, and to tackle existing red tapes, is therefore critical.

The Policy also recognises the creative sector as a key driver of youth economic participation. It will support the commercialisation of creative work through access to funding, digital platforms monetization, market linkages, and intellectual property protection. This ensures that young people in music, film, fashion, and digital content are able to transition from informal participation to sustainable livelihoods.

As I close on economic empowerment and employment, I note that this Policy prioritises rural youth, youth in agriculture, access to land, tailored finance, and infrastructure in underserved areas. This is critical, because youth development cannot be urban, elite, or narrow. It must speak to the young farmer, the rural entrepreneur, the graduate in transition, and the innovator building something from the ground up.

In **civic engagement, peace, and governance**, the Policy makes a strong commitment to youth leadership as a practical national objective. By 2029, at least 35% of leadership and decision-making positions across spheres of development should be held by young people, with gender parity within that representation. By 2030, the Botswana Youth Parliament should be established and functioning through at least two annual sittings, with inclusion targets for young women and youth with disabilities. Youth development should be mainstreamed into all national and district development plans, while programs, policies and legislative instruments should align to properly support and enforce opportunities for young people. The Policy also provides for peacebuilding, juvenile justice reform, continuous intergenerational dialogue, and the development of core attributes such as Botho, democratic values, leadership, peace, and the ability to engage effectively with information and institutions. These

outcomes recognise that the full development of youth can only be realized if decision making opportunities are rightly afforded to them, in an enabling manner.

The Policy also gives substantial attention to **environmental sustainability and global citizenship**. It seeks stronger frameworks for climate action, integration of environmental education across school curricula, increased youth participation in green economy initiatives, and wider access to digital platforms and international opportunities. It aims for Botswana's youth to be equipped not only for domestic participation, but also for a globally connected future through fellowships, exchanges, innovation, digital capability, and cross-cultural competence. This is important because the future facing our youth is not only local, it is global, and our policy must prepare them accordingly.

Beyond these pillars, the Policy also provides for Youth Centres, professional youth development training, a National Internship Program driven by private sector partnership, and a national Mentorship Programme. These matter because youth development needs an ecosystem, not isolated entities. It needs places where services are delivered, standards by which practitioners are guided, and forums through which progress is assessed.

Taken together, **Madam Speaker**, these expected outcomes are the basis of the Policy because they tell us exactly what change must look like. They convert policy language into measurable national direction. They tell us what success should mean in a village, in a classroom, in a district office, in a workplace, in a youth centre, and in the life of an ordinary young person.

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Madam Speaker, a major strength of this Policy is that it does not stop at programme ideas. It recognises that youth development cannot depend indefinitely on goodwill, temporary arrangements, or fragmented mandates. It therefore proposes a strengthened institutional framework that is intended to professionalise, coordinate, and enforce youth development across Botswana.

At the centre of this framework is the Youth Development Act. This legislation is critical because it will create the shift from youth development as a policy preference to youth development as a structured national obligation. It will define roles, establish institutions, clarify obligations, and create enforceable accountability across the ecosystem. In practical terms, this means youth development will no longer sit as an issue that can be acknowledged rhetorically but neglected operationally. It will become a matter of law, structure, standards, reporting, and institutional duty. That is a fundamental shift. It moves us from discretion to obligation, from scattered interventions to a unified system, and from broad intention to enforceable streamlined responsibility. For too long, youth development in many contexts has depended on policy recognition without equivalent legal force. This has meant that even where the intent is good, implementation can remain inconsistent, fragmented, or vulnerable to changes in priority at the discretion of those in leadership. The Youth Development Act is therefore not just another instrument. It is the mechanism through which youth development becomes institutionalised, protected, and measurable.

The proposed National Youth Development Commission will serve as the central coordinating and oversight institution reporting to parliament. Its role will not be ceremonial. It will be the body responsible for driving implementation, compliance, monitoring, and reform. The Commission will track implementation of the National Youth Policy and related youth programmes, monitor whether Ministries and institutions are fulfilling their obligations, identify barriers affecting youth outcomes, recommend corrective action, coordinate data and evidence for youth planning, and ensure that reporting is not fragmented across sectors, making certain that the sanctity and mandate of the policy is followed to the letter. In this regard, the Commission becomes essential to continuity, oversight, and performance discipline.

The Botswana National Youth Council is equally important, but its role is different. It should not simply exist as a symbolic body. It must function as a credible, independent, and representative voice of young people across the country. The Policy already recognises the need for it to be reconstituted and empowered with a governance structure that reflects districts, gender balance, and national representation. That matters because youth participation cannot be meaningful if the institution meant to carry youth voice is weak, vague, or unsustainable. A strengthened Council will serve as the central representative and coordinating body for the interests of the youth by advocating for youth-inclusive policies and advising Government on youth development priorities, ensuring meaningful youth participation in decision making processes, facilitating communication between young people and stakeholders, promoting programs focused on youth employment, entrepreneurship, skills development, health and social inclusions. To act as a voice for

accountability and to ensure national development efforts effectively address the needs and aspirations of the youth population. It will be a legitimate and resourced bridge between young people and the State.

The Youth Parliament should be understood as more than an event platform. Properly structured, it is a leadership development and democratic participation mechanism that will expose young people to legislative processes, policy debate, representation, national dialogue, and decision making. It is one of the clearest ways of translating the phrase “nothing about youth without youth” into institutional practice. It also helps normalize youth presence in governance spaces, rather than treating it as an exception.

IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Madam Speaker, the Monitoring and Evaluation dimension of this Policy must be treated as a core delivery instrument, not a procedural afterthought. A policy of this scale cannot rely on broad claims of implementation. It requires measurable indicators, regular review, institutional visibility, and consequences for underperformance. That is why the accompanying Implementation Plan with a monitoring and evaluating framework is so important. It is intended to produce annual reporting, support mid-term review, and assess progress against defined outcomes across the entire youth development agenda.

But M&E in this Policy must do more than count activities. It must tell us whether youth outcomes are actually improving. It must tell us whether access to vocational training is expanding, whether youth are being employed, whether youth are transitioning from internships into

sustainable opportunity, whether district-level services are becoming more accessible, whether gender inclusion targets are being met, whether youth institutions are functioning, and whether programmes are producing real value. In other words, this framework does not only monitor effort, it measures change, and through the evaluation, will highlight shortcomings and support evidence-based decision-making by providing actionable insights to management and stakeholders, thus ensuring accountability and transparency in the use of resources and recommended adjustments to improve policy outcomes.

This is where the Youth Development Scorecard becomes especially important. The Scorecard will serve as the practical accountability tool that translates policy outcomes into visible performance across sectors. It will allow Government, Parliament, implementing institutions, and the public to see where progress is being made, where gaps persist, and where corrective action is required. It should track performance against the commitments in the Policy, not only at national level but, where possible, across sectors and local implementation points. It is the bridge between policy declarations and delivery discipline.

The National Youth Development Commission will also play a central role in this M&E system by coordinating reporting, analyse performance, identify systemic bottlenecks, recommend reforms, and ensure that findings from the Scorecard and other reporting mechanisms are actually used to improve implementation. This is important because monitoring without response becomes a ritual. The point of this framework is not simply to produce reports. It is to produce accountability, adjustment, and better outcomes.

Madam Speaker, this is the kind of M&E architecture that ensures that progress is not assumed, but demonstrated; that underperformance is not concealed but exposed; that youth development is not reduced to rhetoric, but elevated to a measurable pillar as a matter of national importance, and; that nonperformance is not tolerated but met with clear and enforceable consequences.

CONCLUSION

Madam Speaker, policy is not felt in documents- it is felt in lives. It is the child in a rural village, walking bare foot, long distances to school, whose future depends on whether opportunity reaches beyond our cities and towns. It is the young woman in the city, educated and capable, yet searching for a door that will open meaningful work. It is the man carrying the weight of family and responsibility, striving each day against limited prospects, hoping that effort will meet opportunity.

This National Youth Policy speaks to all of them. Because in the end, the true measure of policy is not what we sat here declared, but whether it changes the trajectory of these lives. That is the standard that we must hold ourselves to.

I thank all the Honorable Members for their continued support, and I thank you, Madam Speaker.