



**DEPUTY MINISTER IN THE PRESIDENCY FOR WOMEN, YOUTH
AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

SPEAKING POINTS BY

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AT THE

**TEENAGE PREGNANCY OUTREACH
KWA-ZULU NATAL**

31 AUGUST 2025 | RICHARDS BAY | 10:00

1. Opening and Framing

- Good morning to all the learners, teachers, parents, faith and traditional leaders, and members of the community gathered here today.
 - I want us to see this as a conversation, not a lecture. Teenage pregnancy is not just an individual problem—it is a challenge that affects our schools, our communities, our economy, and the very future of South Africa.
 - We are here to talk honestly, because if we don't, we risk losing an entire generation of young people to poverty, unemployment, and despair.
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2. Understanding Teenage Pregnancy

- Teenage pregnancy in South Africa remains a crisis. In the 2022/23 financial year, over 150,000 girls aged 10–19 gave birth. That means, on average, 365 teenagers give birth every single day, and about ten of them are younger than 15.
- In the last decade, teenage births accounted for nearly 13% of all births in the country. Provinces like Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal record the highest rates. These are not just numbers, these are lives interrupted, futures at risk, and dreams deferred.

- As UNICEF reminds us, adolescent pregnancy is not just a health issue. It is a human rights issue. It robs girls of education, limits their opportunities, and keeps families trapped in poverty.
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3. The Multi-Dimensional Causes of Teenage Pregnancy

- Poverty, unemployment, and inequality are at the root. As of early 2025, 62.4% of young people between 15 and 24 years old are unemployed. For those aged 15–34, unemployment is at **46.1%**. When families struggle, some girls are forced into survival relationships with older men or “blessers” who provide money, food, or shelter.
- Peer pressure and the rise of hook-up culture also contribute. Globally, studies show that almost one in three hookups among young people happen under the influence of alcohol or drugs. This is no different here at home.
- Substance use is another driver. Research shows over 60% of students in South Africa report using alcohol or drugs with alcohol and cannabis being the most common. One night of intoxication can change the entire trajectory of a young person’s life.
- Mental health plays a role too. Studies in South Africa show that nearly half of young people report symptoms of depression and anxiety, and many young mothers in rural areas face deep stigma and isolation. Teenage pregnancy is therefore not only a physical issue but also a psychological and emotional one.

4. The Socio-Economic Impact of Teenage Pregnancy

- For girls, teenage pregnancy often means **dropping out of school**. Without education, access to decent jobs becomes almost impossible. This continues the cycle of poverty.
- For boys, many escape responsibility, leaving girls and their families to carry the heavy load. This reinforces gender inequality and sets up entire communities for social strain.
- Teenage pregnancy also has health consequences. Research shows that one in five young women aged 15–24 who recently had a baby are living with HIV. Many also face high risks of complications in childbirth because their bodies are not ready for pregnancy.
- As former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan once said, *“Knowledge is power. Information is liberating. Education is the premise of progress in every society.”* Teenage pregnancy cuts off that progress if left unchecked.

5. Government Programmes

- **Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE):** This is not about telling you what to do. It is about equipping you with information to make safe choices, to understand consent, and to protect yourselves.

- **Integrated School Health Programme:** Nurses visit schools to give sexual and reproductive health advice, provide condoms, and make referrals.
 - **Sanitary Pads Programme:** Ensures that no girl misses school because she does not have sanitary products.
 - **NYDA (National Youth Development Agency):** Supports young people with business funding, skills development, and job placements.
 - **YES4Youth and Harambee Accelerator:** Work to connect young people to their first jobs, giving them the dignity of work experience.
 - **Teenage Pregnancy Emergency Response Initiative:** A whole-of-society campaign to prevent teenage pregnancy and to support young mothers so they can continue their education.
 - But these programmes are not enough if young people do not use them, and if communities do not stand behind them.
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6. Civic Duty and the Power of the Vote

- Many of you will soon be turning 18, and that will make you eligible to vote. This is not just a formality—it is your chance to shape the direction of our country. In the last national election, youth voter turnout was worryingly low. Less than 50% of eligible youth under 30 cast their ballots, even though young people make up the largest segment of the voting population.
- This silence allows others to decide on your schools, your jobs, your safety, and your future. When you don't vote, you hand over your

power to those who may not understand your struggles or represent your dreams.

- Voting is not the only form of civic duty, but it is one of the most powerful. Your participation in democratic processes—whether in school councils, community forums, youth organisations, or at the ballot box—ensures that your voice is not ignored.
 - Democracy thrives when young people claim their space. As Barack Obama once said: *“You can’t sit on the sidelines. Don’t boo, vote.”* That message is as true here in South Africa as anywhere else.
 - Remember, the 1976 generation fought for the right to education. Today, your generation must fight for the right to dignity, jobs, equality, and justice. The struggle continues—but your weapon is the ballot paper.
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7. The Role of Communities, Faith Leaders, and Traditional Leaders

- No young person can thrive in isolation. It truly takes a village to raise a child, and this is where the wider community has a responsibility. Communities must not watch from the sidelines when young girls fall pregnant or when boys turn to substance abuse. Instead, we must respond with compassion, mentorship, and guidance.
- Faith leaders have always been at the heart of our liberation struggles, and they continue to be moral voices in society. But we must move away from messages that only condemn. Instead, faith leaders must champion responsibility, dignity, and healing. They

must provide spaces for young people to find mentorship and belonging, not judgement and shame.

- Traditional leaders carry the wisdom of culture. They must ensure that culture protects rather than harms. Practices that place girls at risk, or silence boys from speaking openly about responsibility, must be challenged. Tradition must evolve to empower rather than oppress.
 - Parents and families play the most critical role. Silence at home often leaves children to learn about sex, relationships, and life choices from social media or peers—sources that are often unreliable. Parents must speak openly, with honesty and love.
 - Civil society and NGOs, too, must continue to play their role by offering counselling, mentorship, and skills programmes. Organisations like *loveLife* pioneered youth education on HIV prevention and sexuality. *Sonke Gender Justice* works with boys and men on gender equality. *Act Ubumbano* has supported community dialogues on GBV and teenage pregnancy. These case studies show that when communities mobilise, change is possible.
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8. Men and Boys – Positive Masculinity

- To the boys in this room: teenage pregnancy is not a girl's problem. It is your issue too. If we only speak about girls, we are only telling half the story. Research from the Human Sciences Research Council shows that boys and young men are often socialised into equating manhood with sexual conquest. This mentality is

destructive—it leads to teenage pregnancy, gender-based violence, and broken futures.

- We need a different model of masculinity. Positive masculinity is about respect, responsibility, and care. It is about seeing strength not as dominance, but as partnership. It is about walking alongside girls and young women, not leaving them behind.
 - A young man who refuses to abandon his partner, who supports her education, who takes responsibility for contraception, who respects boundaries—that is a man of strength. Nelson Mandela once said, *“Freedom cannot be achieved unless women have been emancipated from all forms of oppression.”* That liberation requires men to change, too.
 - Let us take inspiration from real-life examples. In Limpopo, a boys’ club initiative called *Brothers for Life* has trained young men to speak openly about fatherhood, respect, and responsibility. These boys are changing the narrative in their villages by declaring: “A real man protects dreams, not destroys them.” We need more of that courage everywhere.
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9. Closing Call to Action

- Teenage pregnancy is not destiny—it is a challenge we can overcome. The statistics are serious, but they are not the end of the story. With knowledge, courage, and support, we can change the narrative.
- Protect your dreams. Guard your bodies. Respect one another. Make use of the programmes available—from Comprehensive

Sexuality Education, to NYDA opportunities, to school health services. These exist for you.

- Let us work together—government, communities, faith leaders, traditional leaders, NGOs, parents, and you, the youth—to break the cycle of teenage pregnancy and to build futures filled with hope.
- As South African feminist scholar Pumla Dineo Gqola has said: *“Freedom is not a one-time event, it is a daily practice.”* Each of you has the power to practice freedom daily, by making choices that protect your future.
- Remember: you are not only leaders of tomorrow—you are leaders today. Your choices, your voices, and your actions will shape South Africa’s future. Stand tall, because you matter, and the country needs you.