

## **City of Johannesburg Supports Youth-Led Green Solutions Amid Sustainability Challenges**

The City of Johannesburg's Department of Economic Development (DED) has reaffirmed its commitment to supporting youth-led green initiatives as part of its response to ongoing sustainability challenges.

Speaking at the Green Economy Youth Pre-Conference & Green Jobs event held in Johannesburg on Thursday, Mathopane Masha, Executive Director of the DED, emphasized the importance of youth participation in tackling environmental issues.

"We face significant challenges many of them environmental and we cannot overcome them without the participation and innovation of young people," said Masha.

The pre-conference, convened by SALGA in collaboration with the City of Johannesburg and Arena Holdings, served as an action-oriented platform focused on tangible solutions to enable a youth-led transition to a green economy.

Acknowledging SALGA's role in the initiative, Masha added, "These conversations are vital as we navigate the complex balance between environmental sustainability and job creation. That balance has proven tricky, which is why many of our sustainability efforts are now embedded in our policies and legislation." he said.

Lyndon Barons, Managing Director of Strategic Partnerships at Arena Holdings, echoed the call for youth involvement.

"This pre-conference should be a platform where ideas flourish, collaborations spark, and real solutions emerge," he said.

"We need the energy, passion, and innovative thinking of young people. You are not just the leaders of tomorrow you are the change makers of today."

Moeketsi Koahela, Co-Chair of Y20 South Africa, emphasised the urgency of a green economy transition led by youth.

"The future green economy cannot wait. Through Y20, we have already begun formal negotiations advocating for sustainable agriculture, renewable energy, climate adaptation, and ecosystem conservation," he said.

Koahela continued, “We are calling for dialogue on Africa’s just energy transition from coal dependency to renewable energy while ensuring equitable resource distribution aligned with the African Union’s Agenda 2063. As youth, we are organizing ourselves across civil society, business, and labour, not to compete for space but to build bridges. We stand for solidarity, equality, and sustainability.”

He also highlighted key thematic focus areas for the youth movement, including climate change, inclusive economic growth, AI and digital innovation, multilateral reform, and inclusive social development.

One of the most compelling moments of the day was the high-level panel discussion titled “From Talk to Tactics: Making Cities Work for Youth,” moderated by Nkhensani Maluleke, Deputy Director in the Department of Economic Development at the City of Johannesburg. The Panellists included;

- Dr. Mamokete Modiba (née Matjomane) – Gauteng City-Region Observatory (GCRO)
- Ms Nobantu Mtimde- African Circular Economy Network (ACEN)
- Mr Luka Dreyer – ICLEI Africa
- Mr Warwick Yardley – Whoppa Cycles

Each panellist offered strategic insights into how local governments can shift from simply inviting youth into the conversation to enabling them to lead within the system.

Panellists also addressed the gaps in youth support ecosystems, from funding and mentorship to recognition in spatial and economic planning. The session also highlighted models of youth-led innovation already making an impact in waste, mobility, and climate adaptation, showing what policy-to-practice really looks like on the ground.

The pre-conference featured high-level engagements, co-design labs, and World Café sessions aimed at generating implementable projects, forging strategic partnerships, and identifying funding pathways. These efforts are intended to feed into the main Green Economy Youth Conference & Green Jobs Expo scheduled for 2025.

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09/06/2025

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