

# COOL POLITICS CAFÉ.

DEMOCRACY  
WORKS  
FOUNDATION.

# 1976 AT 50



## The Soweto Uprising at 50: Youth and Belonging in South Africa

## CONCEPT NOTE

An Intergenerational Dialogue Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of June 16, 1976

### Background and Rationale

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the 1976 Soweto Uprising, a defining moment in South Africa's liberation struggle led by young people resisting systemic injustice in education and governance. The uprising represented more than a protest against Afrikaans as a medium of instruction; it became a powerful assertion of dignity, identity, agency, and the right to shape the country's future.

Fifty years later, this milestone presents an important opportunity not only to reflect on the historical significance of June 16, but also to interrogate how the legacy of that struggle continues to shape contemporary social realities, particularly for young people navigating democracy today.

South Africa is currently experiencing renewed social tensions driven by unrealised expectations of the democratic project since 1994. Deep fractures around identity, access, representation, and belonging continue to surface across political, economic, social, and cultural spaces. Persistent structural inequality, economic exclusion, unemployment, corruption, governance failures, and frustrations with slow or uneven transformation remain among the key factors fuelling disillusionment.

While South Africa's democratic transition secured political freedoms and constitutional rights, the promise of substantive equality and economic inclusion remains incomplete and increasingly contested notably for young people. South Africa's constitutional and governance architecture which was designed to advance democratic participation, social justice, accountability, and inclusive development appears to be falling short of the expectation, as translating political freedoms into tangible socio-economic outcomes has remained uneven and complex.

For many young South Africans, the lived experience of democracy remains marked by exclusion, inequality, and limited access to opportunities. This reality raises urgent questions about how political and governance systems including coalition politics, institutions, and democratic processes can become more inclusive, responsive, and capable of delivering meaningful democratic dividends for all citizens.

Building on this context, Democracy Works Foundation is hosting a Cool Politics Café, an intergenerational dialogue platform for critical reflection and constructive engagement.

## DIALOGUE OBJECTIVES



The dialogue seeks to create a safe, structured, and solution-oriented space where young people, civil society, governance actors, and community leaders can collectively reflect on the meaning of belonging 50 years after the Soweto Uprising.

## KEY THEMES

### **i. The Legacy of June 16 and the Meaning of Freedom Today**

Reflecting on the political and social significance of the 1976 Soweto Uprising and the evolving meaning of freedom, dignity, and liberation across generations. Explore youth activism then and now: continuity, shifts, and new forms of resistance, as well as shared responsibility in nation-building.

### **ii. Youth and Belonging**

Unpack the experiences of inclusion, exclusion, and social alienation among youth. Reimagining active citizenship and co-creating visions for a more inclusive, equitable, and socially cohesive South Africa.

### **iii. Democracy, Governance, and Public Trust**

Young people's perceptions of governance, leadership, and accountability, and how governance systems can become more responsive and inclusive of youth.

## FORMAT AND SESSION FLOW

The dialogue will follow a facilitated, participatory format, designed to prioritise engagement, inclusion, and co-creation.

**The dialogue lasts for 2 hours and 30 minutes**

**11:30-2pm**

**Monday  
15 June 2026**

### **10 MINS: WELCOMING AND SCENE SETTING**

About Democracy Works Foundation and Cool Politics Cafe.

### **50 MINS: PANEL DISCUSSION**

This panel will serve as an interactive platform bringing together diverse stakeholders, experts, practitioners, and legacy community voices. June 16 veteran, Mr Seth Mazibuko will engage participants in a critical dialogue exploring the key themes and issues shaping the discussion.

### **30 MINS: Q & A**

Panel of speakers will engage with the audience with a Q & A session.

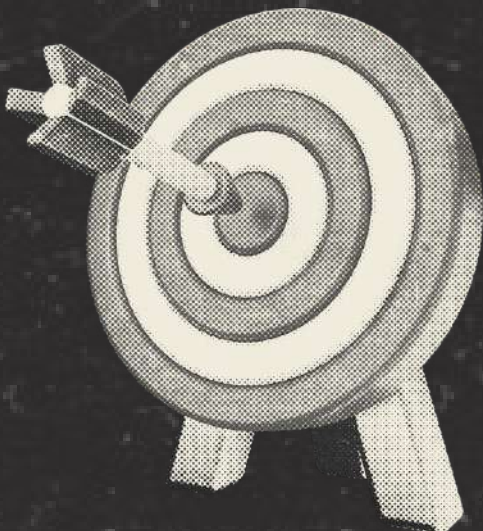
### **15 MINS BREAK**

Health and tea break.

### **45 MINS: FUTURES CO-CREATION SESSION**

Finding pathways towards inclusion, social cohesion and consensus building through guided discussions and participatory engagement.

## EXPECTED OUTCOMES



The dialogue is expected to generate the following outcomes:

- A deeper shared understanding of the historical significance of the Soweto Uprising and its relevance to contemporary youth struggles, fostering empathy, mutual respect, and stronger intergenerational relationships.
- Insights and recommendations on addressing youth marginalisation, exclusion, and social fragmentation, drawn from the intergenerational dialogue's key takeaways and shared lived experiences.
- Actionable recommendations on how governance institutions, policymakers, and civic actors can become more responsive, accountable, and inclusive of youth voices.