S A L
International liaison, dialogue and research
Reg no: 2006/020285/08

The Southern African Liaison Office (NPC)
Regus - Black River Park
1st Floor, Block B, North Park, Black River Park
2 Fir Street, Observatory, Cape Town, 7925
Email: info@salo.org.za
www.salo.org.za
@salo_info

Civil society views on what should take priority during South Africa's 2025 G20 Presidency.

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Introduction

South Africa's G20 Presidency arises at a time when the world faces several economic and political headwinds – including rising geopolitical tensions, growing inequality within and between countries, trade wars, armed conflicts and climate crisis – all of which unevenly impact Africa and the Global South. South Africa's G20 will be the last to be headed by a country from the Global South under the current cycle, passing the baton to the United States of America (USA) in 2026. The prospects for the G20 under an anti-multilateral, transactional, and inward-looking USA look dim, and thus there is an imperative to maximise on South Africa's Presidency.

South Africa's theme of *'Solidarity, Equality, and Sustainability'* underpins the mode of cooperation required to tackle some of the world's most pressing challenges. However, defining what South Africa's G20 means for Africa and how it addresses African civil society's perennial concerns regarding the international system will be pertinent.

With South Africa's agenda well set, and by and large reflecting a number of the aspirations of the continent and the Global South, this paper will focus on what African civil society organisations (CSOs) are most likely to advocate for that has not been explicitly prioritised by the South African government. Views of African civil society actors were drawn from primary and secondary sources, such as interviews, official statements, seminar and workshop proceedings, reports and publicly available analyses.

Civil Society Voices Matter

International civil society has become a critical voice within the G20 architecture, owing to relentless advocacy. Civil society participation within the G20 was formalised in 2013, when the Civil 20 (C20) engagement group was formed and incorporated into the G20 framework during Russia's Presidency. Since then, the C20 has consistently sought to advocate for policies that address global inequalities. Indeed, ***inequality*** has been a core issue for the C20. In 2014, the G20 *"cemented civil society's place in its architecture".*[1] The C20 elaborated on its role as facilitating:

> *"An inclusive process of policy development and engagement with G20 officials aimed at providing influential policy input to G20 decision-makers as they tackle the challenge of ensuring inclusive growth. The C20 will be a critical voice in adding depth to sustainable growth policies".*[2]

The C20 participation has evolved in tandem with the G20's shifts towards more inclusive governance and policymaking practices. Inclusivity enhances the ability to find solutions to multiple challenges by harnessing inputs from a broad spectrum of stakeholders. The C20 has been instrumental in centring inclusive growth and equitable distribution of wealth as *sine qua non* for sustainable development within the G20. As a result:

> *"G20 Leaders are becoming more acutely aware of the necessity for deep, cross-sectoral thinking and problem-solving when it comes to complex, global-scale challenges – such as how to improve wellbeing through inclusive growth, and not merely the pursuit of growth as an end in itself".*[3]

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[1] Costello, T. 2014. C20: A Focus on Inequality. *Australian Institute for International Affairs*. 31 July. Available: https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/c20-a-focus-on-inequality/ [4 May 2025].
[2] Goldie, C. & Costello, T. 2013. St Petersburg G20 Summit Australian C20 Statement. *Australian Council of Social Science.* 9 September. Available: https://www.acoss.org.au/media_release/st_petersburg_g20_summit_australian_c20_statement/ [4 May 2025].
[3] Costello, T. 2014. C20: A Focus on Inequality. Australian Institute for International Affairs. 31 July. Available: https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/c20-a-focus-on-inequality/ [4 May 2025].

African civil society has been a critical part of the C20, and South Africa's G20 Presidency offers a unique opportunity for a bigger role. It is an opportunity to advance positions that are important to the continent, such as global economic governance. Notable South African CSOs, including the Economic Justice Network (EJN), Institute for Global Dialogue (IGD), the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA), and the South African National AIDS Council (SANAC), were all present in Saint Petersburg, Russia, when the C20 was launched in 2013.[4] However, according to a key civil society and academic interlocutor, the attendance and participation of the aforementioned South African CSOs was not strategically coordinated or planned.[5] Nevertheless, CSOs have, over the years, strengthened their collaboration around G20 processes, especially during Brazil's G20 Presidency, when South African CSOs such as EJN, IGD, SAIIA, as well as the Institute for Economic Justice (IEJ) deepened their cooperation and consolidated their participation within G20 structures such as the T20 and C20. EJN is a key member of the C20, whilst IGD and SAIIA are leading the T20 during South Africa's G20 Presidency (South Africa's T20 members have often supported their C20 counterparts and vice versa). The African Union's (AU) civil society representative body, the Economic Social and Cultural Council of the AU (ECOSOCC), which is mandated with promoting *"the participation of African Civil Society in the implementation of policies and programmes of the Union"*[6], notably participated in the C20 China 2016 global conference in Qingdao during China's G20 Presidency. The theme of the Qingdao conference was *"Poverty Eradication, Green Development and Innovation: Role of Civil Society"*. Joseph Chilengi, Presiding Officer of ECOSOCC, in his address at the C20 2016 conference, highlighted the importance of the G20 as a forum for advocacy around developmental issues.[7] The AU's Citizens and Diaspora Directorate (CIDO), in its report on Chilengi's participation at the C20 conference, states that in his address, Chilengi asserted that:

> *"Civil society has always been a major partner in the global development process, and for this reason, commended the Chinese Presidency of the G20 for providing a space for civil society actors from across the world to gather and collectively develop policy recommendations on the central development questions of our time: poverty eradication, green development and innovation. … The Presiding Officer emphasised that it is by pursuing a path of strategic and constructive partnership between governments, civil society, and international development actors that nations can achieve progress in the fight against poverty and establish a sustainable green economy fuelled by technological innovation. Consequently, he called on civil society from all regions of the world to embrace the responsibility of following up on the structures, mechanisms and processes of both the G20 and the C20 in order to organise an effective and meaningful civil society response to the key developmental challenges with which the world remains confronted"*.[8]

ECOSOCC remains a key institution in terms of supporting global CSO engagement with African CSO stakeholders, as evidenced by ECOSOCC's hosting of the inaugural Africa-China People-to-People (P2P) Dialogue in May 2025, which sought to bring together *"civil society organisations from Africa and China to foster friendship, cultural exchange, and sustainable development"*.[9] ECOSOCC's ties to Chinese CSOs highlights the importance of China as a core developmental partner for Africa. It will be

[4] Pressend, M. 2013. SA Civil Society and Public at Large Need to Influence International Relations. *The South African Civil Society Information Service.* 2 July. Available: https://sacsis.org.za/site/article/1710 [4 May 2025].
[5] Ibid.
[6] African Union: Economic Social and Cultural Council of the African Union. 2025. *Mandate*. n.d. Available: https://ecosocc.au.int/en/mandate [4 May 2025].
[7] African Union: Citizens and Diaspora Directorate. 2016. *ECOSOCC Presiding Officer Participates in Civil Society 20 China 2016 Conference*. 5 July. Available: https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20160705-0 [4 May 2025].
[8] Ibid.
[9] African Union: Economic Social and Cultural Council of the African Union. 2025. *Africa-China People-to-People Dialogue: "Strengthening Friendship, Empowering Communities"*. 8 May. Available: https://ecosocc.au.int/en/ac-p2p-dialogue [8 May 2025].

interesting to observe how this relationship impacts its participation within the G20 framework, particularly concerning issues of sustainable development.

Purpose of the G20

The G20 was launched primarily as a platform for Finance Ministers, Central Bank Governors, and their institutions to discuss international economic and financial issues that face the global economy. It has since expanded its agenda to include issues such as trade, sustainable development, health, agriculture, energy, environment, climate change and anti-corruption. Combined, G20 countries account for almost two-thirds of the global population, 75% of global trade and 85% of the world's GDP.[10] The forum is touted as the premier setting for international economic cooperation and governance.[11] It plays an important role in shaping and strengthening the global financial architecture.

South Africa's G20 is informed by the country's National Development Plan (NDP), Africa Agenda 2063, and long-standing unresolved and emerging issues requiring international action. The G20 has sector-specific engagement groupings for state actors to source and engage the perspectives from these various stakeholders. These engagement groups are an important avenue for civil society participation. They are as follows:

I. Business 20 (B20)
II. Civil Society 20 (C20)
III. Innovation, Entrepreneurship, and Collaboration (Start Up 20)
IV. Labour 20 (L20)
V. Ocean 20 (O20)
VI. Parliament 20 (P20)
VII. Science 20 (S20)
VIII. Supreme Audit Institutions 20 (SAI20)
IX. Supreme Courts and Constitutional Courts (J20)
X. Think 20 (T20)
XI. Urban 20 (U20)
XII. Women 20 (W20)
XIII. Youth 20 (Y20)

SA's G20 Presidency: Some Strategic Considerations for Civil Society

The South African government has emphasised and actively promoted the participation of civil society for its G20 Presidency, underscoring the vibrancy and influence of South Africa's civil society (a legacy of South Africa's liberation struggle and transition to democracy). South Africa's National Development Agency (NDA), in a 2020 research report, asserted that *"evidently, CSOs are developmental partners to public and private sector, international donors and foreign governments, including philanthropic organisations"*.[12] This spotlights the notable role CSOs play in terms of public policy within South Africa. Furthermore, the NDA, drawing on research findings conducted amongst BRICS countries and analysed by Poskitt *et al* (2016), explains that South Africa *"ranks the highest out of the BRICS countries, with high scores for government cooperation and an environment conducive to policy dialogue. This result also reinforces our research finding that the South African government has remained willing to engage with CSOs"*.[13] There appears to be continuity in terms of Poskitt et *al*'s

[10] G20 South Africa. 2025. *Overview*. n.d. Available: https://g20.org/about-g20/overview/ [4 May 2025].
[11] G20 Brazil. 2024. *G20 Rio de Janeiro Leaders' Declaration*. 19 December. Available: https://g20.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/G20-Rio-de-Janeiro-Leaders-Declaration-EN.pdf [4 May 2025].
[12] National Development Agency. 2020. *Research Report: Civil Society Funding Mechanisms in South Africa.* October. Available: https://www.nda.org.za/assets/resources/CF824421-4FA0-41EE-AB69-4DB10CD0384A/CSOsFundingMechanisms-FinalReport.pdf [4 May 2025].
[13] Ibid.

initial observations (despite occasional tensions around governance and socioeconomic development issues). Consequently, this has extended to the government's approach to the G20 Presidency. Dr Ntombifuthi Nala, Acting Chief Director: Research Analysis and Knowledge Services at the Department of Government Communication and Information System, highlighted the South African government's openness and invitation to CSO participation during the G20. Dr Nala, in a January 2025 statement, elucidated:

> *"South Africa will ensure a broad-church approach in our G20 Presidency by expanding dialogues with international organisations and civil society so that we can collectively shape how the G20 addresses pertinent issues. We see the participation of civil society as part of our overall commitment to work towards a broader and more inclusive G20 Presidency… South Africa firmly believes that civil society serves as a bridge between the G20 leaders and the people who have the greatest interest in their deliberations. Moreover, their experience and grassroots knowledge will greatly enrich the G20's collective discussions and policy decisions"*.[14]

President Ramaphosa reiterated South Africa's commitment to civil society participation in his November 2024 G20 Presidency handover speech (marking the end of Brazil's G20 Presidency, and the shift to South Africa's Presidency). The president asserted:

> *"We commend Brazil for elevating the participation of social and civil society groups in the work of the G20 by convening the first-ever G20 Social Summit. South Africa firmly believes that civil society serves as a bridge between the G20 leaders and the people who have the greatest interest in their deliberations. … We will continue with this innovative platform for engagement during our Presidency. This is in line with our own traditions as South Africa to involve civil society formations in all matters of importance to the people of the country. It was through the actions of civil society formations in South Africa that we were able to end apartheid and achieve our democracy"*.[15]

This is reassuring, but it remains important for civil society to clearly define its strategic goals. As cautioned by Ohene Ampofo-Anti, Center for Economic and Social Rights (CESR) Program Associate, CSOs must be careful not to uncritically endorse the G20 and inadvertently legitimise a process that is otherwise tokenistic. CSOs must carve out a policy space for themselves in relation to the G20.[16]

Two statements from key South African civil society actors underscore the need for African CSOs to safeguard autonomy and policy space from vested state-bound interests (often undermined by broader geopolitical machinations). Sekoetlane Phamodi, Program Director of the New Economy Hub, in a series of statements, posits:

> *"Throughout our engagement with the G20 process, being civil society, we also have to be realistic about our ability to influence it. We must remember that this is a government-to-government platform, and engagement platforms such as* [this] *tend to be used and instrumentalised more for politics and optics. This is all the more reason why this moment*

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[14] Government Communication and Information System. 2025. *South Africa's collective approach to the G20 Presidency*. n.d. Available: https://www.gcis.gov.za/node/10705 [4 May 2025].
[15] The Presidency: Republic of South Africa. 2024. *Remarks by President Cyril Ramaphosa at the G20 Closing and Handover Ceremony of the G20 Leaders' Summit, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil*. 19 November. Available: https://www.thepresidency.gov.za/remarks-president-cyril-ramaphosa-g20-closing-and-handover-ceremony-g20-leaders-summit-rio-de [4 May 2025].
[16] Ampofo-Anti, O. 2024. "Solidarity, Equality and Sustainability" - Why the first African G20 Summit could be a game changer for rights-based reforms. *Center for Economic and Social Rights*. 13 November. Available: https://www.cesr.org/solidarity-equality-and-sustainability-why-the-first-african-g20-summit-could-be-a-game-changer-for-rights-based-reforms/ [4 May 2025].

> *demands for us to build a C20 platform that is inclusive and global in character, a platform that is collaborative and is committed to continuing the progressive agenda that has been laid by our predecessors"*.[17]

Jenny Ricks, General Secretary of Fight Inequality, highlights the importance of what she terms 'outsider track' activities during South Africa's G20 Presidency. Ricks argues:

> *"The purpose* [of the outsider track] *is the need to have that autonomous space as civil society movements* [and] *organisations. For example, we know the South African government does not really intend to do very much concretely to take forward the Brazilian agenda on taxing the rich. We know that without a strong outsider push* [and] *upping the political pressure, not much is going to happen. The same is possibly true of the debt agenda, which is a critical piece, as this is the first African Presidency of the G20"*.[18]

Ricks goes on to emphasise the importance of education and awareness raising to ensure meaningful participation:

> *"For many people, this is an entirely new conversation. Locating your struggles* [and] *experiences in this global economic context requires a political education process. That needs to begin as the Brazilians did and other countries before, in India* [and] *Indonesia. That requires a long process, especially if you are wanting to come up with declarations, common demands, etc. … Another piece is street protests and those sorts of tactics that visibly show people power and visibly give space and voice to the headline demands and messages that people want to create together. That may also not just be in November when texts of communiques, the political substance of what the G20 would say, is locked down. That pressure might also need to be created earlier in the year when some of the key political decisions are being made*".[19]

There are some notable exclusions from South Africa's G20 Agenda strategy that civil society should be concerned about. The CESR highlights the failure to explicitly commit to 'anti-racist economics' and endorse a CSO-proposed '*New Sovereign Southern Debt Pact*'. This, according to Ampofo-Anti, was *"the leading civil society ask – tackling austerity, illicit financial flows, taxing the rich, and addressing debt in an integrated fashion"*.[20] Maintaining autonomy allows civil society to apply pressure and influence from within and without. The Trump administration's antipathy towards what it terms the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion (DEI) agenda is an example of state-based interests or policy that might potentially undermine not only the G20 process as a whole, but also derail the important work of the C20 and other non-state working groups.

During Brazil's Presidency, civil society called for the G20 to commit to anti-racist economics. It is not clear to what extent South Africa's Presidency will build on "*Brazil's ground-breaking work on 'fair, inclusive and anti-racist economies' by taking this further with an explicit intersectional approach"*. [21] The national and international debacle around South Africa's Expropriation Act attests to the country's ongoing battle with the material consequences of its apartheid legacy, compounded by some notable post-apartheid governance failures. However, the conflation of constitutionally sound legislation with race-based discourses around land ownership signals a need for reflection on non-racist economics.

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[17] Oxfam South Africa. 2024. *G20 Info Session Webinar Day 1* [Video File]. Available: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S-nelwaYhJQ&t=311s [4 May 2025].
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ampofo-Anti, O. 2024. "Solidarity, Equality and Sustainability" - Why the first African G20 Summit could be a game changer for rights-based reforms. *Center for Economic and Social Rights*. 13 November. Available: https://www.cesr.org/solidarity-equality-and-sustainability-why-the-first-african-g20-summit-could-be-a-game-changer-for-rights-based-reforms/ [4 May 2025].
[21] Ibid.

CSO aspirations and objectives might be too radical (or political) for some G20 states, including a multi-party governed South Africa. The harsh response to South Africa's G20 priorities and theme, particularly relating to diversity, inclusion and sustainability, by the US Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, coupled with funding cuts, presents further impediments for civil society asks.

The relationship between NGOs and philanthropic organisations needs to be clarified in relation to CSO programmes aligned to South Africa's G20. In an environment where key donor states (such as the US and the Netherlands) are either implementing or considering significant cuts to international aid, the role of international philanthropy becomes more salient. Neither the South African government nor the C20 appear to have explicitly elaborated on the role of philanthropic organisations or resources. This might be an oversight considering that global philanthropic financial resources amount to at least US$1 trillion per annum.[22] Furthermore, the C20 Brazil 2024 recommendations stated that the C20 would *"recognise and support the catalytic role of philanthropy to promote sustainable development"*.[23]

World Wide Network for Grantmaker Support (WINGS), a *"global network of philanthropy support and development organisations"*[24], was a key CSO participant during the Brazil G20 Presidency. In tandem with Brazilian philanthropic organisations such as the Group of Institutes, Foundations and Enterprises (GIFE network) and the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), WINGS co-chaired *"the first-ever C20 Working Group 9 on Philanthropy for Sustainable Development"*[25], thereby highlighting the increasing importance of philanthropic resources in terms of sustainable socio-economic development. Mehra and Kelso state:

> *"The C20 Working Group 9 broadly agreed that incrementalism in the global policymaking processes and siloed approaches cannot solve the world's structural challenges. Structural and systemic transformations are needed. To contribute to this transformation, philanthropy needs to sharpen its engagement in the processes through two key roles. The first is to be a strategic partner in public policy, working with governments to recommend better and more effective policies for long-term, inclusive and sustainable development. This is reflected in recommendations such as international tax cooperation, as well as a common regulatory framework to guide philanthropic engagement in public policy. Philanthropy's second role is to support governments to engage in cross-sector partnerships for effective collaboration due to its catalytic capital, networks, influence, access to local knowledge, and the ability to bring local and diverse leaders to the table"*.[26]

South Africa's G20 Presidency allows national and African CSOs to clearly delineate the role they want philanthropic organisations to play concerning national and regional developmental challenges.

The decision by President Trump to unilaterally cut or extensively scale back USAID programmes is likely to affect health advocacy NGOs and broader CSO actors and institutions, particularly those focused on HIV prevention and mitigation initiatives. In a recent statement on the 8th of February 2025, imploring President Ramaphosa to act promptly in response to the Trump administration's

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[22] McCarthy, N. 2018. Where Philanthropy Dollars are Concentrated. *Statista*. 7 May. Available: https://www.statista.com/chart/13766/where-philanthropy-dollars-are-concentrated/ [4 May 2025].
[23] Frediani, A. A. & Nùñez, P. S. 2024. Driving impact at the G20: lessons from IIED's engagement with philanthropies. *International Institute for Environment and Development.* 24 July. Available: https://www.iied.org/driving-impact-g20-lessons-iieds-engagement-philanthropies [4 May 2025].
[24] World Wide Network for Grantmaker Support. 2025. *Elevating Philanthropy.* n.d. Available: https://wingsweb.org/# [4 May 2025].
[25] Mehra, S. & Kelso, C. 2024. How WINGS' G20 advocacy speaks to governments. *Alliance Magazine*. 27 August. Available: https://www.alliancemagazine.org/blog/how-wings-g20-advocacy-speaks-to-governments/ [4 May 2025].
[26] Ibid.

unprecedented withdrawal of American global health funds, an international coalition of health advocacy CSO actors (which includes a few South African organisations) known as Community Health and HIV Advocate Navigating Global Emergencies (CHANGE), declared:

> *"Action is critical, particularly in* [President Ramaphosa's capacity] *as the African Union (AU) Champion on Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness and Response (PPPR) and as South Africa takes on the G20 Presidency"*.[27]

Therefore, African civil society is likely to push for the G20 to find a sustainable solution to the global health funding crisis directly caused by the USA's politically informed (and biased) unilateralism.

European Union and NATO countries are reconfiguring their fiscal allocations to make provisions for a greater percentage of GDP on Defence spending, considering the state of the Russia-Ukraine War, resulting in significant cutbacks on developmental aid to the African continent, and compromising affected organisations' ability to continue carrying out their work. Therefore, African CSOs and governments are required to consider their developmental funding models and sources to ensure their resilience in the medium to long term.

Resonance Between South Africa's Priorities and the C20 Agenda

During South Africa's Presidency of the G20, the C20 has faced leadership challenges; however, African CSOs continue to meet concerning the relevant G20 issue areas, including ongoing work in the various Working Groups.[28] The Working Groups intended for the C20 during South Africa's Presidency of the G20 will be[29]:

I. Gender Equity & Feminist Just Economies
II. Food Security
III. Anti-Racism, Climate & Energy Justice
IV. Peace, Security & Gun Control
V. Environmental Justice & Sustainable & Resilient Communities
VI. Integrated Health for All
VII. Global Financial Architecture Reform & Debt
VIII. Education for All
IX. Technology & Digitalization
X. SDG16: Delivering & Protecting Democracy and Fighting Corruption

Elevated Priority 1: Strengthening disaster resilience and response.

Both the C20 and the G20 realise that urgent measures must be undertaken to mitigate the effects of climate change-related natural disasters. During Brazil's Presidency, global civil society articulated the following policy recommendation to the G20:

> *"Urgently implement just transition plans, with fossil fuels divestment and more ambitious climate mitigation and adaptation measures in line with a 1.5°C scenario, act to prevent and reduce disaster risks, and to protect the rights of the people and territories in vulnerable*

[27] Cullinan, K. 2025. South African Civil Society Urges President Ramaphosa to 'Step Up' to Address HIV Funding Crisis. *Health Policy Watch.* 10 February. Available: https://healthpolicy-watch.news/south-african-civil-society-urges-president-ramaphosa-to-step-up-to-address-hiv-funding-crisis/ [4 May 2025].
[28] C20 Brazil. 2025. *Civil20 International Advisory Committee Communicate*. 20 January. Available: https://c20brasil.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/C20-letter_South-Africa-G20-Sherpa_Jan2025.pdf [4 May 2025].
[29] Nkhabu, M. 2025. The role of C20 in shaping an inclusive G20 2025. *Friedrich Naumann Foundation*. 24 March. Available: https://www.freiheit.org/sub-saharan-africa/role-c20-shaping-inclusive-g20-2025 [4 May 2025].

conditions – especially in the Global South – ensuring new, additional and flexible financing to effectively respond to climate change, accessible and adapted to the needs of groups at the frontline of climate adaptation processes".[30]

The South African government, in its Concept Note ahead of the country's Presidency, posited that:

"The increasing rate of climate-induced natural disasters is affecting countries around the world, with a devastating impact on those countries that cannot afford the costs of recovery and rebuilding. South Africa will elevate this issue to leader level, calling for the global community, including international financial institutions, development banks and the private sector, to scale up post-disaster reconstruction".[31]

Therefore, both these actors underpin the importance and urgency of dealing with climate change-related disasters to mitigate their impact on those most vulnerable, especially those in the Global South, as climate-related disasters disproportionately affect those nations, even though they have contributed least to climate change-inducing pollution. The South African statement is, however, less emphatic about transitioning from fossil fuels.

The AU's specialised agency, the African Risk Capacity, in a white paper titled *'The State of Natural Disasters in Africa'*, stated that, following Asia and the Americas, the African continent has experienced the third most climate-related natural disasters.[32] For the African continent, how we build resilience - including continent-wide early warning systems (EWS) - is important, as only 40% of the continent is covered by EWS.[33] The withdrawal by President Donald Trump from the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change's Paris Agreement[34], with its impact on the Green Climate Fund, the Loss and Damage Fund, and the Just Energy Transition Partnerships for transitioning to low-carbon economies on the African continent, renders this issue even more urgent.[35] The rechannelling of resources towards defence by European countries further compounds these issues.

The risk is that countries in Africa and the Global South will be forced to borrow more from international financial institutions, private banks and bilateral lenders to plug the gap, deepening Africa's debt crisis. This will weaken climate resilience and slow down the transition to low-carbon economies.

Elevated Priority 2: Debt sustainability for low-income countries.

According to the World Bank, Lower-Income Countries accounted for US$8.8 trillion in debt to external actors.[36] The Report of the United Nations Secretary General on the New Partnership for Africa's

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[30] C20 Brazil. 2024. *C20 Brazil: Civil Society for a Sustainable World*. 12 November. Available: https://c20brasil.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/C20-Policy-Pack-2024_Digital.pdf [4 May 2025].
[31] G20 South Africa. 2025. *G20 South Africa Presidency: Concept Note and Calendar*. 11 February. Available: https://g20.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/20241205v-FINAL-G20-CONCEPT-NOTE-SOUTH-AFRICA.pdf [4 May 2025].
[32] African Risk Capacity. 2024. *The State of Natural Disasters in Africa*. 10 July. Available: https://www.arc.int/sites/default/files/2024-07/ARC_white_paper_2024.pdf [4 May 2025].
[33] Ibid.
[34] The White House. 2025. *Putting America First in International Environmental Agreements*. 20 January. Available: https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/putting-america-first-in-international-environmental-agreements/ [4 May 2025].
[35] Naidoo, D. 2025. US Paris climate agreement exit will hit Africa hard. *Institute for Security Studies*. 26 February. Available: https://issafrica.org/iss-today/us-paris-climate-agreement-exit-will-hit-africa-hard [4 May 2025].
[36] Essl, S., Celik, S. K., Kirby, P. & Proite, A. 2019. Debt in Low-Income Countries: Evolution, Implications, and Remedies. *World Bank Group: Macroeconomics, Trade and Investment Global Practice*. March. Available: https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/fr/378031553539256399/pdf/Debt-in-Low-Income-Countries-Evolution-Implications-and-Remedies.pdf [4 May 2025].

Development states that Africa's debt has climbed to over US$650 billion in 2024, with servicing of debt costs accounting for around US$90 billion for the same year.[37]

This unsustainable debt was exacerbated by COVID-19 responses, infrastructure rebuilds following climate-related natural disasters, developmental backlogs, governance challenges, and high-interest payment regimes, resulting in greater pressure on the fiscus and an inability to deliver on services due to increasing debt repayment burdens.

External debt has had an impact on the ability of states and the international community to deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as only 18% of the SDGs have been achieved by the international community, with five years to go until their deadline of 2030.

The Pandemic Action Network (PAN), a CSO collective comprised of African CSOs focused on building pandemic resiliency, alongside the Resilience Action Network Africa (RANA), in a February 2025 petition to G20 Foreign and Finance Ministers, emphasised the need for development financing reforms to safeguard sustainable development objectives. The petition underlined five key issues:

I. The current multilateral debt architecture is inadequate; and the G20-endorsed Debt Common Framework must be "significantly enhanced", as is consistently highlighted by African Finance Ministers. PAN declares that the Debt Common Framework must become *"more time-bound, radically transparent, and offer service reductions on application"*.[38] Furthermore, there must be greater complementarity between private sector credit initiatives and IMF-related ones. PAN notes: *"Expanded creditor committees with the private sector must help enforce comparability of treatment with more use of IMF lending into arrears to reduce holdout creditors' leverage"*.[39]

   In terms of multilateral finance development funds targeted at SDGs, and the legal debt frameworks which underpin the allocation of such funds, PAN recommends:

   > *"The IMF-World Bank Debt Sustainability Analysis needs an overhaul to make it more SDG and solvency focused, while enhanced collective action clauses, vulture fund legislation, state-contingency debt instruments, and national-level strengthening of Debt Management Offices and Public Finance Management are needed to improve global and national debt legal frameworks"*.[40]

   However, it is also imperative to protect African countries from unforeseen 'acts of god' pertaining to natural disasters and similar 'shocks'. PAN posits that *"debt pause clauses should be implemented by all creditors in the case of natural disasters, famines, and major epidemics and pandemics"*.[41]

II. There must be **improved targeting of focused Official Development Assistance (ODA) aid grants** (what PAN terms **smart ODA**). This includes direct allocation of ODA to grassroots bodies or actors. PAN states:

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[37] United Nations: Office of the Special Adviser on Africa. 2024. *Unpacking Africa's Debt: Towards a Lasting and Durable Solution*. n.d. Available: https://www.un.org/osaa/content/unpacking-debt-africa-towards-lasting-and-durable-solution#:~:text=In%20the%20post%2DCOVID%2D19,directly%20in%20their%20citizens'%20future [4 May 2025].
[38] Pandemic Action Network. 2025. *Decisive G20 Leadership Needed for People and Planet — Civil Society Call for Action*. 17 February. Available: https://www.pandemicactionnetwork.org/news/decisive-leadership-for-people-and-planet-g20-call-to-action/ [4 May 2025].
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.

> *"Much aid is incredibly impactful and effective, especially when it is in citizens' hands or well scrutinised locally by them and when it scales the latest innovations. Failure by high-income countries (HICs) to deliver on climate and development ODA quality and quantity promises has damaged trust and led to geopolitical tensions.* ***To stabilise the global economy, smart ODA should be increased, focused where most effective and invested in the markets and consumers of tomorrow****"*.[42]

III. Urgent **'redirection' of unused Special Drawing Rights to African and Global South countries.** PAN argues that *SDRs "should be redirected Global South to deliver on climate and development priorities. New SDRs issues can and should be explored if more recycling is not implemented rapidly and effectively"*.[43]

IV. **Innovative financing** for *"debt-free climate and development finance"* is something that must be placed on the agenda of the 4th International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD4) to be held in Seville (Spain) in July 2025 via G20 CSO advocacy, if possible. Furthermore, as G20 states are set to join the Coalition for Solidarity Levies, the possibility of generating new sources of development-related finance for issues relating to climate issues, such as just-energy transitions, becomes a tangible possibility (albeit one underpinned by complex negotiations). PAN notes:

> *"With all G20 governments joining the* Coalition for Solidarity Levies *to deliver on new mechanisms for debt-free climate and development finance. These mechanisms include aviation, fossil fuel, and global shipping levies, as well as financial transaction taxes and advancing the wealth tax already agreed at the G20 level".*[44]

V. It is imperative for the South African-led G20 to explore viable and urgent solutions regarding the reduction of capital costs for economic development initiatives within low and lower-middle-income countries. PAN propounds:

> *"Action is needed to reduce the high costs of capital borne by low- and middle-income countries. Implementable proposals to advance this — for example, across credit rating methodologies and data gaps, and prudential regulation — should be developed under the South African G20 with expert advice outlining a roadmap for implementation"*.[45]

An engagement between the B20, C20, W20, Y20, T20, the Cost of Capital Commission, the International Financial Architecture Working Group and the Finance Track might produce useful insights, if not perceptive recommendations on this issue, as this is an intersectional matter that impacts collective global development as underpinned by the theme of *"Solidarity, Equality and Sustainability"*.

Elevated Priority 3: Mobilise finance for a just energy transition.

The debt burden on developing countries entails added fiscal pressures, thus further derailing these countries' developmental trajectories, especially concerning their prospects of attaining a just energy transition. According to the UN Adaptation Report of 2023:

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[42] Pandemic Action Network. 2025. *Decisive G20 Leadership Needed for People and Planet — Civil Society Call for Action*. 17 February. Available: https://www.pandemicactionnetwork.org/news/decisive-leadership-for-people-and-planet-g20-call-to-action/ [4 May 2025].
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.

"The modelled costs of adaptation in developing countries are estimated at US$215 billion per year this decade. The adaptation finance needed to implement domestic adaptation priorities is estimated at US$387 billion per year. Despite these needs, public multilateral and bilateral adaptation finance flows to developing countries declined by 15% (US$21 billion) in 2021. As a result of the growing adaptation finance needs and faltering flows, the current adaptation finance gap is now estimated at US$194-366 billion per year. At the same time, adaptation planning and implementation appear to be plateauing. This failure to adapt has massive implications for losses and damages, particularly for the most vulnerable".[46]

For countries such as South Africa, the Presidential Climate Commission (PCC) estimates that US$18.6 billion per annum will be required to meet net-zero by 2050, and that US$29.9 billion per annum is needed in the short term to meet the 2030 NDC target. To meet it's NDCs by 2030, South Africa needs to invest US$55.9 billion in mitigation and up to US$609 billion in adaptation. Currently, the majority of financial sources are in debt financing (75%) with only 1% and 2% in grants and concessional funding, respectively. In addition, most funding is allocated to mitigation projects (81%), with only 12% allocated to adaptation projects.[47]

The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change sets out three long-term goals:

I. Substantially reduce global greenhouse gas emissions to hold global temperature increase to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursue efforts to limit it to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, recognising that this would significantly reduce the risks and impacts of climate change.
II. Periodically assess the collective progress towards achieving the purpose of this agreement and its long-term goals.
III. Provide financing to developing countries to mitigate climate change, strengthen resilience and enhance abilities to adapt to climate impacts.[48]

Therefore, it is incumbent for the G20 Summit to consolidate the various recommendations stemming from the COP and previous G20 Summits to mobilise resources appropriately to ensure that developing countries strengthen their resilience against the shocks of climate-related natural disasters. By doing so, state parties will adhere to their legal obligations to the planet.

During the Brazilian Presidency of the G20, the following joint recommendations were made by the C20/T20 Convergence Dialogue held by T20 Task Force 2 – Sustainable Climate Action and Inclusive Just Energy Transitions, and C20 Working Group 3 – Environment, Climate Justice and Just Energy Transition. The G20 should:

I. "Support institutional capacity-building aimed at the design and implementation of nationally-led transition plans in developing countries, with robust mechanisms for engagement of civil society, the scientific community and local governments and communities;
II. Increase South-South and North-South cooperation to facilitate the transfer and co-development of technologies to promote a green industrialisation pathway, focusing on alternatives for low-income and commodities-dependent countries;

[46] United Nations: Environment Programme. 2023. *Adaptation Gap Report 2023*. n.d. Available: https://www.unep.org/resources/adaptation-gap-report-2023 [4 May 2025].
[47] Costas, T. & Nott, G. 2024. COP29: It's all about the money and how we are going to pay to survive in this climate-challenged world. *Norton Rose Fulbright*. November. Available: https://www.nortonrosefulbright.com/en/knowledge/publications/8b52d7d2/cop29-its-all-about-the-money-and-how-are-we-going-to-pay-to-survive [4 May 2025].
[48] United Nations: Climate Action. 2025. *The Paris Agreement.* n.d. Available: https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/paris-agreement [4 May 2025].

III. *Foster the provision of grants-based and highly concessional finance mechanisms to fund such transition plans;*
IV. *Prioritise regions and communities dependent on fossil fuels by providing retraining and reskilling programs and social safety nets to vulnerable and underrepresented populations".*[49]

Furthermore, they recommend the following for a fairer international tax system. The G20 should:

I. *"Create a roadmap for subsidy repurposing containing assessments of affected sectors, job retraining needs, policy-specific implementation deadlines and accountability mechanisms to redirect government support from fossil fuels to clean energy;*
II. *Support the implementation of a CBDR-RC-compliant taxation of major polluters' activities and on high-polluting corporations;*
III. *Promote a fair and inclusive international tax system, including by supporting the implementation of a minimum tax on the income of very-high-net-worth individuals and the establishment of the United Nations Framework Convention on International Tax Cooperation (UNCITC) and its efforts to enhance tax cooperation and eliminate tax evasion;*
IV. *Promote debt justice by cancelling sovereign debt of vulnerable and highly indebted countries to free resources to address the climate and development crises, and promote efforts to increase concessional finance at least fivefold by 2030 to mitigate and respond to the impacts of climate change;*
V. *Promote new allocations of Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) to close the climate finance gap, based on a new framework for access to liquidity with a greater share of SDRs allocated to low- and middle-income countries on a needs-based, timely and accessible manner".*[50]

The G20 Rio de Janeiro Leaders' Declaration (2024) broadly addressed some of the key recommendations and concerns noted above and articulated in the 'Convergence Dialogue' between the T20 Task Force 2 and C20 Working Group 3 groupings. However, the diplomatic and consensus-based language of the Leaders' Declaration muted or simply disregarded some of the more potentially divisive recommendations. The omission of key civil society calls for transformative structural reforms highlights the political nature of the G20 framework at the Heads of State level.

The recommendations which were noted in the Leaders' Declaration[51] included:

I. The importance of *"scaling up public and private climate finance and investment for developing countries"* from billions to trillions of dollars emanating from diversified sources (point 43). These scaled-up climate financial resources and investments would then be used primarily to 'accelerate' technological innovations which enhance resilience in terms of green energy solutions, lower greenhouse-gas emissions, and support green industrialisation initiatives (point 43).[52]

II. Highlighting the importance of urgently *"bridging the funding gap for energy transitions globally, especially in developing countries"* (point 49).[53] A key aspect relating to this aspiration involves the facilitation of 'low-cost financing' for developing countries regarding their respective energy transition policies. Closely linked to this is the significance of actively supporting developing country governments in terms of *"domestic energy planning, capacity building, policy strategies and frameworks, as well as cooperation between different levels of*

[49] C20 Brazil. 2024. *Convergence Dialogue Between T20 and C20*. n.d. Available: https://c20brasil.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/declaracao-tematica-2.pdf [4 May 2025].
[50] Ibid.
[51] G20 Brazil. 2024. *G20 Rio de Janeiro Leaders' Declaration*. 19 December. Available: https://g20.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/G20-Rio-de-Janeiro-Leaders-Declaration-EN.pdf [4 May 2025].
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.

government" in order to establish *"enabling environments to attract financing for energy transitions"* (point 49).[54]

III. Promoting technologically innovative and inclusive market-oriented solutions in terms of the development of *"low-emitting energies, sustainable fuels and technologies",* and prioritising *"hard-to-abate sectors"* for which the majority of developing countries are dependent on for their energy and production needs (point 51).[55]

IV. Respecting national or local policy approaches to climate as well as energy transition issues. The Leaders' Declaration asserted that it endorsed the *"Principles for Just and Inclusive Energy Transitions"* approved by the G20 Energy Transitions Working Group in accordance with the recognition of the unique 'national circumstances' of participating countries (point 54). Thereby *"taking them into account when devising and implementing domestic policies to pursue energy transitions"* (point 54).[56]

Therefore, evidently, the Leaders' Declaration took note of the recommendations raised by the T20 and C20 Convergence Dialogue, to a notable extent. However, the challenge lies in ensuring that G20 governments and their development partners (less wealthy African countries) have the capacity to implement the more technical aspects proposed for a just transition, green industrialisation and the adoption of green innovative technology. This might mean actively promoting African-based climate specialists and experts to steer key energy transition and green industrial policy initiatives. Taking this into consideration underscores that the T20 and C20 Convergence Dialogue must be urgently carried over into South Africa's G20 Presidency.

The avoidance of potentially controversial issues relating to debt justice, IMF Special Drawing Rights reforms, as well as global tax reform in the Brazil G20 Leaders' Declaration in relation to climate concerns highlights the need for the C20 (and African CSOs in particular) to amplify these issues during South Africa's G20 presidency. The C20 and T20 groupings, particularly the former, have the necessary policy space to directly raise the aforesaid issues within the G20 framework, without the constraints of needing to be diplomatic, as compared to their state counterparts (ministers and government policymakers).

Thus, continuity moving from the Brazil G20 to the South African G20 will be crucial in generating international momentum for these necessary climate-related reforms. The South African G20 Agenda has placed this as an elevated priority for deliberation by the Heads of State and Government at the Summit in South Africa.

Elevated Priority 4: Harnessing critical minerals for inclusive growth and sustainable development.

As societies attempt to transition to low-carbon economies through technology, the G20 will deliberate on the 'just' nature of this transition. South Africa has placed critical minerals as the underpinning feature for Africa and the world's inclusive growth and sustainable development. According to the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa:

[54] G20 Brazil. 2024. *G20 Rio de Janeiro Leaders' Declaration*. 19 December. Available: https://g20.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/G20-Rio-de-Janeiro-Leaders-Declaration-EN.pdf [4 May 2025].
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.

> *"With approximately 30% of the world's mineral reserves, including cobalt, lithium, and nickel, which are considered essential for the green transition, African countries need to exploit these resources to drive its development, particularly trade and industrialisation"*.[57]

Therefore, the African continent is essential in the deliberations concerning critical minerals. The continent intends to leverage these endowed natural resources to attain inclusive growth and become the engine for the future of the world's low-carbon economies. Therefore, genuine attainment of inclusive growth contributes towards the realisation of sustainable development priorities.

INCLUDE, a Dutch multi-sector organisation comprising Dutch and African policymakers, experts, academics and CSOs funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has carried out comprehensive work on inclusive growth within Africa in recent years. INCLUDE's African CSO-backed research, underpinned by African case studies, underscores the linkage between inclusive growth and sustainable development. Furthermore, inclusive growth fundamentally seeks to address inequality and economic marginalisation, thereby highlighting the importance of CSO advocacy around inclusive growth during the G20. INCLUDE notes:

> "*Inclusive development is achieved when improvements are realised in the income and non-income dimensions of development, and inequalities in these dimensions fall. Recent developments in Africa (and globally) show the necessity of adopting this approach. Inequality is on the rise, and the detrimental effect this has on economic growth and social and political stability are increasingly being recognised. To avoid such effects, inclusive development has become a must"*.[58]

An analysis of African contexts by INCLUDE (including case studies in Ghana, Kenya, and Uganda) indicated that six core objectives need to be addressed by governments (in tandem with CSO stakeholders) when trying to initiate transformative inclusive growth economic development priorities. These six objectives are:

I. *"Economic growth with structural transformation of the economy*
II. *Productive employment, i.e. more jobs with good working conditions, remuneration and stability.*
III. *Social protection for resilience, poverty reduction and sustainable economic growth*
IV. *The provision of basic services (education, health, finance, infrastructure, housing, water, etc.)*
V. *Territorial development and spatial equity (e.g. between rural and urban areas)*
VI. *Quality and inclusive governance, especially for poor minorities and other marginalised groups"*.[59]

A key challenge with respect to the sustainable realisation of these key objectives is that they must be complemented by significant human capital investments pertaining to adequate healthcare, education, and transport or mobility. However, currently, African spending on healthcare and education is below world averages. UNICEF, in a 2024 joint publication brief with the AU entitled *'Education Spending in Africa: The impacts of COVID-19 and possible recovery pathways*', noted that

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[57] United Nations: Economic Commission for Africa. 2024. *Africa's critical mineral resources, a boon for intra-African trade and regional integration*. 22 December. Available: https://www.uneca.org/stories/africa%E2%80%99s-critical-mineral-resources%2C-a-boon-for-intra-african-trade-and-regional-integration#:~:text=With%20approximately%2030%25%20of%20the,trade%20and%20industrialization%2C%20experts%20say [4 May 2025].

[58] Reinders, S., Dekker, M., van Kersteren, F. & Oudenhuijsen, L. 2019. Inclusive Development in Africa. *INCLUDE*. March. Available: https://includeplatform.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/ID-synthesis-INCLUDE-Final.pdf [4 May 2025].

[59] Ibid.

African countries are not honouring their prior budgetary commitments with regard to education funding. The brief asserts:

> *"**Most African countries are not honouring their commitments to allocate 20% of their total budgets to education**. In 2019, only eight out of 44 governments with data spent 20% or more of their total government budget on education. Furthermore, eight governments spent less than 10% on education"*.[60]

It is imperative for African CSOs to highlight the issue of inadequate public spending on education throughout the continent within G20 platforms. Furthermore, this highlights why agreements around the localisation of processing and industrialisation for critical minerals on the African continent are necessary to drive economic growth, job creation, and the reduction of inequality.

In a joint declaration between the T20 and C20 during Brazil's Presidency of the G20, they recommended the following to the G20 Summit, *"to enable energy transitions strategies within a fair, sustainable, and global economic transformation:*

I. *Support institutional capacity-building aimed at the design and implementation of nationally led transition plans in developing countries, with robust mechanisms for engagement of civil society, the scientific community, and local governments and communities;*
II. *Increase South-South and North-South cooperation to facilitate the transfer and co-development of technologies to promote a green industrialisation pathway, focusing on alternatives for low-income and commodities-dependent countries;*
III. *Foster the provision of grants-based and highly concessional finance mechanisms to fund such transition plans;*
IV. *Prioritise regions and communities dependent on fossil fuels by providing retraining and reskilling programs and social safety nets to vulnerable and underrepresented populations"*.[61]

In addition to these recommendations presented by the Brazil T20/C20, the South African G20 needs to address how to collectively prevent another scramble for Africa that could fuel the flames of ongoing conflicts on the continent and the international arena. Therefore, an additional recommendation on the creation of a 'Kimberley-like' process for critical minerals will become necessary.

This proposal could also impact the European continent, as the USA has signed a critical minerals deal with Ukraine in return for security guarantees. The same is evident with President Donald Trump's approach to the peace agreement between the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Rwanda. These actions place the global peace and security architecture under pressure as they can potentially undermine existing conventional peace-making and peace-building mechanisms. Without such a framework that deals with conflict-derived critical minerals, the international community stands the risk of potentially, once again, building their industrialisation on the bodies and blood of African other marginalised peoples – thus removing the 'just' aspect from the transition to low-carbon economies.

South Africa's elevated priority of harnessing critical minerals for inclusive economic growth and sustainable development will remain a pipedream if countries maintain barriers to human development, economic prosperity and peace, as these are interconnected and interdependent

[60] UNICEF & African Union Commission. 2024. *Education Spending in Africa: The impacts of COVID-19 and possible recovery pathways.* June. Available: https://www.unicef.org/esa/media/13981/file/Education%20Financing%20Brief.pdf.pdf [4 May 2025].
[61] C20 Brazil. 2024. *Convergence Dialogue Between T20 and C20*. n.d. Available: https://c20brasil.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/declaracao-tematica-2.pdf [4 May 2025].

concepts that require collective action from the international community. Otherwise, we will be unable to achieve the collective ambitions outlined in the SDGs.

CESR CSO Recommendations

The CESR, an international NGO committed to economic justice advocacy, recently published a G20 strategy and policy recommendation guide for CSOs and affiliated partners participating in G20 processes during South Africa's Presidency.[62]

The guide notes that one of the key legacies of Brazil's G20 Presidency is that CSOs were able to engage with both tracks of the G20, the Finance and Sherpa tracks, respectively. The latter includes meetings organised for national leaders and foreign ministers, whilst the former pertains to forums for ministers of finance and central bank governors. The CESR states:

> *"During Brazil's G20 Presidency, engagement groups were allowed to formally present their recommendations to both G20 tracks—a significant innovation, as formal participation is typically limited on the Finance Track."*[63]

This 'significant innovation' initiated by the Brazil Presidency must be carried over to the South Africa Presidency, particularly noting the importance of CSO engagement with policymakers (a normalised South African convention).

The CESR guide also underlines how important it is to ensure continuity in terms of core agendas and topics to be carried over from the Brazil Presidency (and prior Global South G20 Presidencies of Indonesia and India) to avoid losing advocacy momentum, particularly noting the risk posed by how *"each presiding country tends to focus on its 'signature' issues driven by its political preferences"*.[64] The CESR states:

> *"For organisations engaging with the G20, it is crucial to recognise the risk of topics losing continuity. One key lesson from this challenge is the importance of building on the legacy of previous C20 and G20 efforts rather than starting anew each year. Additionally, while the G20 serves as a valuable platform for fostering discussions, it is essential to ensure that topics are also pursued in other relevant forums to maintain momentum and broaden impact"*.[65]

The guide goes on to underscore the need to avoid 'watered-down' or 'lukewarm' commitments (or resolutions) to fundamental issues, which may result from competing interests amongst G20 participating actors, particularly noting the contemporary divisive international context. For instance, 'liberal democracies', due to their liberal-oriented politico-economic preferences, might be reluctant to support the aspirations of Global South actors, including demands for a more significant say in global economic governance structures (thereby indicating a shift in longstanding global economic governance policy). This has implications for proposed G20 resolutions on debt sustainability and economic justice-oriented taxation. Therefore, it might be prescient for developing country CSOs, including those from Africa, to 'press' for their needs and objectives in other multilateral spaces to sustain and buttress their advocacy within the G20. The guide asserts:

> *"While the G20, often through partnerships, can theoretically contribute to developing principles, blueprints for action, and certain mechanisms, it is crucial for CSOs to plan*

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[62] Center for Economic and Social Rights. 2025. *Influencing the G20 Agenda for Economic Justice: A Guide for Change Makers*. 29 January. Available: https://www.cesr.org/sites/default/files/2025/Influencing_G20_for_Economic_Justice.pdf [4 May 2025].
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.

strategically how to sequence their demands across the G20 and other forums. Although the G20 can raise the profile of an issue, organisations aiming for greater ambition or specificity should align their G20 advocacy with efforts in other spaces where more detailed and impactful outcomes can be achieved."[66]

Furthermore, the guide notes that CSO actors must have adequate knowledge about the political contexts of G20 members as well as the capability to forecast how geopolitical factors might potentially impact CSO advocacy within G20 forums. The CESR guide propounds:

> *"CSOs actively engaging with the G20 should invest time in exploring and understanding the political contexts of participating countries. By doing so, organisations can design strategies that anticipate potential changes and are resilient enough to withstand shifting political dynamics"*.[67]

The guide argues that national CSOs should be at the forefront of advocacy around pressing national agenda issues in South Africa. This primarily relates to policies which can effectively address poverty, inequality and unemployment. South African CSOs are central to the promotion of key national developmental priorities. This cannot be left to foreign organisations (although they can support by extending solidarity and expertise). In a section entitled *"Connecting the international and national"*, the guide states that the:

> *"G20 primarily focuses on international issues, but the country holding the Presidency often includes agenda items that align with its national priorities. CSOs engaging with the G20 are frequently national organisations that either support or challenge these priorities while working to bring their own demands to the discussions. Ultimately, national organisations are best positioned to represent the people whom G20 commitments aim to benefit and should therefore have a meaningful voice in the process"*.[68]

SALO is well-positioned to support the initiatives of partner CSOs in actively promoting national developmental and socioeconomic priority issues.

The G20 Social of Brazil's successful G20 Presidency must be transmitted over to South Africa's presidency. Brazil G20 Social sought to establish a forum for both national and international CSOs with a view to *"consider civil society's contributions and, where consensus exists, integrate them into the Leaders' Declaration [via the Sherpa track]"*.[69] The Brazilian government notes:

> "*Coordinated by Brazil's General Secretariat of the Presidency of the Republic, the G20 Social is an unprecedented initiative introduced under Brazil's G20 Presidency. Its goal is to enhance social participation in the discussions at the G20 Leaders' Summit*".[70]

A key aspect of the G20 Social was to link CSO aspirations and programmes with the Sherpa Track of the G20, thereby ensuring that G20 national or political leaders were informed and aware of civil society's needs and objectives. The CESR guide states:

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[66] Center for Economic and Social Rights. 2025. *Influencing the G20 Agenda for Economic Justice: A Guide for Change Makers*. 29 January. Available: https://www.cesr.org/sites/default/files/2025/Influencing_G20_for_Economic_Justice.pdf [4 May 2025].
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Government of Brazil. 2024. *G20: Social Summit begins November 14 in Rio de Janeiro*. 25 October. Available: https://www.gov.br/secom/en/latest-news/2024/10/g20-social-summit-begins-november-14-in-rio-de-janeiro [4 May 2025].
[70] Ibid.

> *"The G20 Presidency of Brazil gathered the different engagement groups often, as an important legacy of its effort to build a 'G20 social'. Engagement groups were therefore able to share recommendations, debate, and understand that even when their positions on certain issues were different, the issues of relevance themselves were the same. Brazil's decision to allow engagement groups to formally present the recommendations on the two official tracks was also relevant and should be maintained in the future.* ***The South African Presidency of the G20 is committed to continuing the G20 social initiative****"*.[71]

The G20 Social, as highlighted by Brazil's G20, can galvanise public participation and provide informative knowledge about the G20 and its attendant processes. In South Africa, it could be supported by 'public diplomacy' initiatives from the GNU government. The G20 Social, with reference to the Brazilian experience, tends to be broader than just NGOs and seeks to include cultural and artistic groupings as well. In Brazil, the G20 Social also included all the major engagement groupings including the C20, T20, Y20, W20, L20, U20, B20, S20, Start Up 20, P20, SAI20, and the newest J20 and O20".[72] South Africa has announced the establishment of a new CSO-type engagement group, Township20 (TS20), which seeks to amplify *"the voices of township enterprises, reaffirming their essential contributions to broader economic frameworks"*.[73]

The media can be a key ally in terms of CSO policy advocacy (as evidenced by SALO and partner groupings' opinion pieces around the G20). In this regard, it is important for African CSOs to leverage the role of the media during South Africa's G20 Presidency. The CESR guide expounds:

> *"Leveraging media—both national and international—is crucial to capitalise on this opportunity, as it not only influences public opinion but also shapes the perspectives of decision-makers. CSOs should strategically plan to engage with both international and national media as a core component of their advocacy efforts, leveraging the G20's platform to maximise attention and support for their agendas"*.[74]

South Africa's G20 Presidency provides an opportunity for regional and African CSOs to take their agendas forward to regional multilateral bodies such as SADC and the Pan African Parliament, such as the active promotion and (re)prioritisation of the 2008 SADC Poverty Reduction Plan. The guide, drawing on the Brazilian experience, argues:

> *"The G20 provides valuable opportunities to galvanise CSO action on economic justice across various spaces, serving as a 'stepping stone' to advance work in other forums. It can also help reframe and elevate national-level debates, particularly where specific issues face resistance from domestic actors. For example, some Latin American countries outside the G20 have endorsed Brazil's efforts under its G20 Presidency through the Regional Platform for Tax Cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean (PT-LAC)7 to promote an international approach to taxing the super-rich"*.[75]

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[71] Center for Economic and Social Rights. 2025. *Influencing the G20 Agenda for Economic Justice: A Guide for Change Makers*. 29 January. Available: https://www.cesr.org/sites/default/files/2025/Influencing_G20_for_Economic_Justice.pdf [4 May 2025].
[72] Government of Brazil. 2024. *G20: Social Summit begins November 14 in Rio de Janeiro*. 25 October. Available: https://www.gov.br/secom/en/latest-news/2024/10/g20-social-summit-begins-november-14-in-rio-de-janeiro [4 May 2025].
[73] Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneurs. 2024. Township20: Elevating Peri-Urban Economies to Global Prominence. 3 December. Available: https://andeglobal.org/township20-elevating-peri-urban-economies-to-global-prominence/ [4 May 2025].
[74] Center for Economic and Social Rights. 2025. *Influencing the G20 Agenda for Economic Justice: A Guide for Change Makers*. 29 January. Available: https://www.cesr.org/sites/default/files/2025/Influencing_G20_for_Economic_Justice.pdf [4 May 2025].
[75] Ibid.

The importance of cross-sector collaborations to strengthen CSO advocacy was also spotlighted in the CESR guide. For a number of South African and African CSOs, tapping into the knowledge and expertise of the T20 NGOs is highly beneficial in terms of enhancing C20 proposals as well as formalising the public contributions from G20 Social initiatives. The guide underscores this point:

> *"The work of engagement groups and the wide range of issues the G20 now addresses creates opportunities to build global, cross-sector coalitions of CSOs. For instance, CSOs can collaborate with politically aligned research institutions under the T20 or with research centres working alongside the G20's official tracks. The extent to which engagement groups provide collaboration opportunities for CSOs may vary from year to year, depending on factors such as alignment with the presiding government, prevailing political positions, and internal decisions regarding how 'open' the space is for cross-sector collaboration"*.[76]

Conclusion

If the South Africa Presidency of the G20 is to achieve significant gains for the world's poorest and most disempowered, the mobilisation of the global population through progressive CSOs is a key objective. Progressive governments, such as South Africa during its Presidency, must be mobilised to support this campaign and ensure that it is adopted as the short, medium and long-term vision and strategy of the G20. All efforts should be made to shape a clear program of action to mobilise the global population behind key demands. Clear campaigns must be established to educate, organise and mobilise the vast numbers of poor, marginalised, exploited, oppressed and disenfranchised people.

To build sustainable momentum beyond South Africa's term, CSOs must strategically preserve and advance gains from prior Global South presidencies, resisting the G20's tendency toward political discontinuity. This includes defending inclusive proposals such as anti-racist economics, universal basic income, and a 'New Sovereign Southern Debt Pact'.

As demonstrated during Brazil's Presidency, enabling CSOs to formally engage both Sherpa and Finance Tracks sets a precedent that South Africa must institutionalise. At the same time, African CSOs should leverage other multilateral arenas such as the UN and regional bodies, including the AU and SADC, to reinforce G20 advocacy and insulate key demands from dilution.

Importantly, civil society must also reimagine its relationship with philanthropic actors, clarifying expectations and accountability in an era of declining public aid. Integrating these actors into a coordinated development agenda, underpinned by catalytic, non-extractive funding models, will be crucial. Additionally, deeper collaboration with the T20 can bridge technical expertise with grassroots legitimacy.

Finally, establishing permanent multistakeholder platforms such as the G20 Social can extend the influence of CSOs and foster an enduring legacy rooted in solidarity, equity, and sustainability.

[76] Center for Economic and Social Rights. 2025. *Influencing the G20 Agenda for Economic Justice: A Guide for Change Makers*. 29 January. Available: https://www.cesr.org/sites/default/files/2025/Influencing_G20_for_Economic_Justice.pdf [4 May 2025].

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International liaison, dialogue and research

The Southern African Liaison Office (SALO) is a South African-based not-for-profit civil society organisation which, through advocacy, dialogue, policy consensus and in-depth research and analysis, influences the current thinking and debates on foreign policy, especially regarding African crises and conflicts.