DEMOCRACY WORKS FOUNDATION.

F20

POLICY BRIEF SERIES

UNDERSTANDING THE FOUNDATIONS20 RECOMMENDATIONS THROUGH AN AFRICAN LENS

BACKGROUND

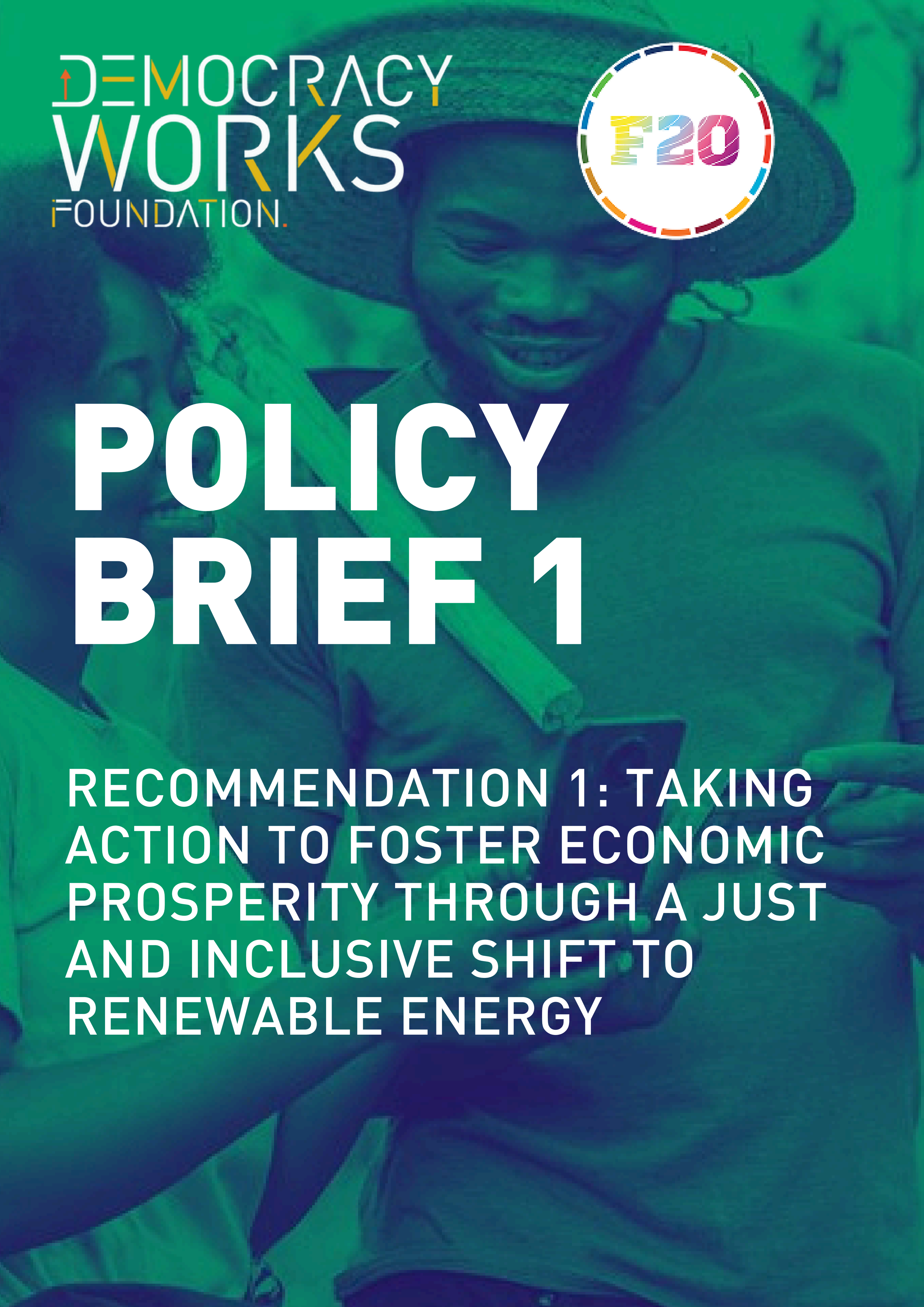
In December 2024, South Africa assumed the G20 Presidency, under the theme "Solidarity, Equality, Sustainability." The high-level deliverables and priorities under this theme lie at the core of the original G20 mandate of promoting Strong, Sustainable, Balanced and Inclusive Growth. Taking up its presidency, approximately five years before the deadline of the United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda, the country has committed to accelerating action to achieve the SDGs. As a result, the country has committed to representing broader African interests, and climate and sustainability agendas have been mainstreamed across the South African G20 working and engagement groups, presenting several opportunities for further local, regional, and international climate and energy democracy agendas.

As an unofficial engagement group of the G20, Foundations20 (a group of 80+ philanthropies and foundations committed to climate and sustainability action) has been working to align G20 politics with climate agendas, the Paris Climate Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) for nearly 10 years. In 2025, Democracy Works Foundation (DWF) was appointed as the chair of Foundations20 and over the last several months, has been hard at work to centre climate and energy democracy in the G20 agenda - acting as an interlocutor between engagement groups, and using the South African G20 Presidency to further the continent's climate goals. The Foundations20 our recommendations to the G20 Presidency in February 2025. This set of 7 recommendations includes a depth and range of topics that encapsulate the type of systemic approach required to address the climate crisis. The F20 recommendations to the South African G20 Presidency, set the tone for an ambitious agenda that connects climate action to the broader goals of economic transformation and social justice. These recommendations have a deep resonance on the African continent, and this policy brief explores how the recommendations support existing African climate and energy transitions agendas.

Under the South African G20 Presidency, the global community has a unique opportunity to re-imagine climate action through the lens of democracy, building on the country's human rights traditions.

This series of policy briefs aims at understanding the F20 Recommendations to the South African G20 Presidency from an African lens. It explores the opportunities presented by South Africa's G20 presidency for furthering African climate agendas. Drawing on the thought leadership of African activists, scholars, policymakers, civil society, and private sector actors who are advancing climate and energy justice across the continent, the policy brief series delves into some of the key developments emerging from the South African G20 Presidency.

The policy briefs are further informed by a baseline survey assessing awareness levels among political parties and civil society actors across the continent, as well as rich insights gathered at global and regional forums such as F20's Climate Solutions Forum, the Business20 launch event, the Y20 pre-summit and summit, the T20 midterm summit, the Urban20 Summit, and other key multi-stakeholder engagements throughout 2025. These briefs also reflect on the evolving communiqués, recommendations, and calls to action emerging from G20 working groups, official engagement groups, and technical partners.



POLICY BRIEF 1

RECOMMENDATION 1: TAKING ACTION TO FOSTER ECONOMIC PROSPERITY THROUGH A JUST AND INCLUSIVE SHIFT TO RENEWABLE ENERGY

INTRODUCTION

This policy brief focuses on F20 recommendation 1: Take Action to Foster Economic Prosperity through a Just and Inclusive Shift to Renewable Energy.

Under this recommendation, the F20 calls on the G20 to accelerate the global energy transition by rapidly phasing out fossil fuels, massively scaling up investments in renewable energy and grid infrastructure, and ensuring the transition is socially just. It emphasises that this shift is both an environmental imperative as well as a cornerstone of future-proofing economic development, energy security, and job creation globally. Foundations 20 (F20) Recommendation 1 calls for the acceleration of the global energy transition through a rapid phase-out of fossil fuels, massive investment in renewables and grid infrastructure, and ensuring a just and inclusive shift. For Africa, this agenda is both a development necessity and a strategic opportunity. With over 600 million people lacking electricity access and the continent disproportionately exposed to climate risks, the urgency of a clean energy transition cannot be overstated [1]. Yet, Africa also holds unparalleled renewable potential and critical mineral reserves that position it to drive global decarbonisation.

The South African G20 Presidency (2025) has advanced this agenda by mainstreaming climate, sustainability, and just transition issues across working groups and engagement platforms. This included a focused working group on Energy Transitions.

The Second Energy Transition Working Group (ETWG) meeting, held in Cape Town from 30 April to 2 May 2025, provided a critical platform for advancing Africa's energy transition priorities under South Africa's G20 Presidency. Chaired by Acting Director-General Subesh Pillay and opened by Minister of Electricity and Energy Dr. Kgosientsho Ramokgopa, the meeting underscored the principles of solidarity, sustainability, and equality as a clarion call to place people at the centre of global energy transitions. Dr. Ramokgopa's intervention importantly reframed the debate by linking energy security and energy transition are not competing imperatives, but rather twin priorities that must be de-risked and advanced together.

The meeting resulted in three interconnected priorities that together signal Africa's ambition to lead in shaping the global energy transition. Taken together, these priorities present both opportunities and risks. If pursued through participatory, rights-based approaches, they can transform the energy transition into a driver of democratic deepening, embedding transparency, local decision-making, and social justice into Africa's green growth. But without strong safeguards, the same priorities risk reinforcing centralised power, fossil lock-in, and extractive dependencies, outcomes that would undermine both democracy and the just transition itself.

At the core lies the imperative of energy security and affordable access, with Africa determined to address the staggering 623 million people still living without electricity while positioning itself as a global renewable energy hub. This ambition, echoed in the Addis Ababa Declaration of the Africa Climate Summit (held in September this year), demands a diversified energy mix (i.e. including renewables, gas, hydropower, nuclear, and hydrogen) that could either catalyse inclusive growth or entrench new dependencies, depending on how governance frameworks evolve.

Equally central in the South African G20 Presidency's energy transition agenda is the commitment to a just, affordable, and inclusive transition, balancing climate ambition with industrialisation, job creation, and social equity. Yet the real democratic test lies in defining what "just" means in practice and ensuring that decisions are not left to technocrats or elites. Workers, women, youth, and marginalised communities must be at the table if transitions are to avoid reproducing old inequalities and instead become vehicles for empowerment and participation. For example, in African countries, extractive industries often adopted patrimonial relationships with communities that created dependencies instead of long term social mobilisation or lasting economic growth [9].

The third priority of the Energy Transitions Working Group is around African interconnectivity, looking outward, and advancing regional power pools and cross-border trade to strengthen resilience and drive down costs. The African Union has already laid important foundations for this vision through instruments such as the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA), the Continental Power System Master Plan (CMP), and the African Single Electricity Market (AfSEM), which is set to become the world's largest electricity market.

More recently, the African Union's Climate Change and Resilient Development Strategy and Action Plan (2022–2032) reaffirmed the centrality of regional integration to meeting climate and energy targets, while the Addis Ababa Declaration from ACS2 strengthened commitments to cross-border renewable energy infrastructure. These frameworks place Africa at the forefront of cooperative, transnational energy governance, positioning interconnectivity as a pathway to both climate ambition and economic transformation.

1 Decoding Africa's Energy Journey: Three Key Numbers - https://unsdg.un.org/latest/stories/decoding-africa%E2%80%99s-energy-journey-three-key-numbers#:~:text=600%20million%20Africans%20without%20access,access%2C%20according%20to%202022%20data. \
2 Shifting sands: the geopolitical impact of climate change on Africa's resource conflicts - https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03736245.2024.2441116#d1e144
3 South Africa's Just Energy Transition Investment Plan (JET-IP) - https://www.climatecommission.org.za/south-africas-jet-ip#
4 Africa Sets Its Sights On A Green Hydrogen Future - https://infrastructuresa.org/africa-sets-its-sights-on-a-green-hydrogen-future/
5 Building the Green Economy in Africa: A Call for Innovation, Investment, and Collaboration - https://africaenergyindaba.com/building-the-green-economy-in-africa-a-call-for-innovation-investment-and-collaboration/#:~:text=Cape%20Town%2C%20South%20Africa%20%E2%80%93%2005,adapt%20to%20climate%2Dsmart%20practices.
6G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors. Communiqué 3rd Finance Ministers and Central Banks Governors Meeting https://www.treasury.gov.za/comm_media/press/2025/3rd%20G20%20FMCBG%20Communique.pdf

This vision is not without risks. Large-scale projects and cross-border initiatives, if pursued without transparency and public participation, can reproduce the very inequalities they aim to solve and could risk concentrating power in state monopolies, fostering elite capture, or sidelining communities most affected by energy infrastructure.

For Africa, the urgency of the F20 recommendation on energy transitions is sharpened by a unique convergence of challenges in a context where, across the continent, democratic backsliding is increasingly linked to public frustration with governments that have not delivered on their most fundamental promise of providing reliable and affordable electricity. Energy access has become a litmus test for democracy itself, shaping whether citizens experience democratic governance as meaningful or hollow [10]. In this context, regional energy interconnectivity carries both promise and risk. Across Africa, energy transitions remain beset by distributive and procedural injustices that undermine the vision of a just energy transition (JET). Large-scale renewable projects frequently deliver benefits unevenly, clustering in specific regions while bypassing others, and prioritising national grid stability over local connectivity. Many rural and peri-urban households remain excluded from access to electricity despite living near new renewable projects, while costs of connection and appliance adaptation remain prohibitively high. Employment opportunities are similarly skewed with construction providing short-term local jobs, but long-term manufacturing and technical employment remain concentrated in urban centres [11]. These patterns have perpetuated inequality and raise questions of fairness in how energy transition benefits are shared.

Without strong governance safeguards, it risks reinforcing disillusionment, entrenching elite capture, and reproducing inequalities. These safeguards will be required to meet all the “ justice” elements of the justice energy transition, including it’s distributive justice (fair allocation of costs and benefits), procedural justice (inclusive and transparent decision-making), restorative justice (adequate mitigation and compensation for harms), and recognition justice (acknowledging and protecting the rights and needs of vulnerable groups) elements [12]. If AU-led frameworks like the AfSEM, CMP, and ACS2 Declaration are grounded in these justice elements, they have the potential to promote and safeguard democratic policies, processes and institutions - even beyond the energy sector.

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7 IISD (2019) G20 Support to Coal Power Plants Increases By More Than Double: Report https://www.iisd.org/articles/press-release/g20-support-coal-power-plants-increases-more-double-report

8 SAIIA (2025) G20 Is Too Elite. There Is a Way To Fix That Though – Economists https://saiia.org.za/research/g20-is-too-elite-there-is-a-way-to-fix-that-though-economists/#:~:text=As%20chair%20of%20the%20G20,its%20deliberations%20and%20their%20outcomes.

In terms of procedural justice, in many projects, community members report being consulted only superficially. Landowners are often the only ones involved and non-title holders or indigenous groups are often excluded. In terms of restorative justice, compensation for land or resource loss often fails to reflect the real value of livelihoods or cultural loss. For instance, in Ghana, projects that enclose forest commons for solar PV farms have disrupted women's access to firewood and grazing lands, without fair recognition or compensation [13].

Opportunities embedded in G20 outcomes

While successive G20 presidencies have made ambitious pledges to scale up renewables, phase out fossil fuel subsidies, and double energy efficiency, implementation on the ground continues to lag. The barriers are not technical, but political and include structural weaknesses in the G20 system, the entrenched interests of domestic political economies, and a persistent misalignment between global climate goals and local socio-economic realities. For Africa, bridging this gap requires centring institutional accountability in the localisation of G20 commitments. Financing flows must align with nationally determined priorities and be channelled through transparent, participatory processes, rather than imposed as externally designed projects. Doing so would not only accelerate the energy transition but also strengthen democratic governance by linking global climate ambitions directly to the lived realities and choices of African citizens.

Under South Africa's G20 Presidency, the Finance Track and the Development Working Group (DWG) have together shaped a compact of political and financial outcomes aimed at accelerating equitable energy transitions and sustainable development.

From the finance side, the deliberations have prioritised reforms to Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs), including changes to capital frameworks designed to free up concessional and lower-cost lending. Participants have signalled support for the mobilisation and reallocation of Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) as well as the expansion of blended finance vehicles and interoperability between MDBs and climate funds and have also endorsed practical toolkits to accelerate project preparation and bankability these measures are intended to shorten transaction timelines and reduce the risk premium that currently makes major renewables and grid modernisation projects prohibitively expensive in many countries.

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9 Good Governance Africa. Minings Revival Must Also Deal with its Legacy. https://gga.org/minings-revival-must-also-deal-with-its-legacy/
10 Sustainable Energy Africa (2023) Mobilizing Social Movements for Energy Democracy and Sovereignty in South Africa https://sustainable.org.za/mobilizing-social-movements-for-energy-democracy-and-sovereignty-in-south-africa-towards-socially-owned-renewable-energy-solutions/
11 Akron, M et al (2024) Characterizing 'injustices' in clean energy transitions in Africa. Energy for Sustainable Development Vol. 83.
12Climate Sustainability Directory (n.d) Energy Justice Frameworks https://climate.sustainability-directory.com/term/energy-justice-frameworks/

While tangible recommendations have been presented to unlock the capital required to fund the energy transition, this rhetoric must be converted into tangible actions before the end of South Africa's presidency.

The Development Working Group outcomes have emphasised that finance alone is insufficient unless paired with social protection, inclusion and democratic accountability. The DWG's agenda has elevated the idea of global public goods and universal social protection as integral to energy transitions. Proposals emerging from the DWG include a proposed Ubuntu Commission to explore Global Public Goods frameworks which should be positioned to facilitate stronger linkages between energy policy and social safety nets. These seek to ensure transitions deliver tangible benefits such as clean cooking, job retention and retraining, and reliable access for vulnerable communities.

It is important that the final G20 communiqués move beyond principle to establish clear, multi-stakeholder implementation pathways so that civic actors and citizens can hold their governments accountable to the commitments made at platforms such as the G20. But, as a consensus-based forum, the G20's energy and climate commitments are politically binding, not legally enforceable. This creates a fundamental accountability gap. A national government can sign a declaration to "phase out inefficient fossil fuel subsidies" or "accelerate renewable energy deployment" without any obligation to enact domestic legislation or reallocate its national budget. The language is often deliberately vague to achieve consensus, allowing governments to claim adherence while continuing policies that support incumbent fossil fuel industries. Without a robust enforcement mechanism, these pledges remain aspirational rather than operational.

13 Nyantakyi-Frimpong, H et al (2023) Volta photovoltaics: Ruptures in resource access as gendered injustices for solar energy in Ghana. Energy Research & Social Science
14 Hillbrich (2020) The democratic deficit of the G20. Journal of Global Ethics
15 Cooper, A (2011) The G20 and Its Regional Critics: The Search for Inclusion.
16 Gronau, J (2016) Signaling Legitimacy: Self-legitimation by the G8 and the G20 in Times of Competitive Multilateralism

POLICY BRIEF 2

RECOMMENDATION 2: ADVANCING INDUSTRIAL DECARBONISATION IN AFRICA THROUGH G20 LEADERSHIP

INTRODUCTION

This policy brief focuses on F20 recommendation 2: Implement measures to catalyse sustainable industrial decarbonisation.

This policy brief examines the relevance and application of F20 Recommendation 2, within the African context, as well as the points of convergence and divergence with the Final G20 Declaration under the South African G20 Presidency. It explores how industrial decarbonisation, targeting sectors such as steel, cement, and chemicals, can drive both climate action and sustainable economic growth across the continent. Drawing on key developments under the South African G20 Presidency, including commitments from the Finance and Energy Transitions Working Groups, as well as engagement group initiatives from T20, B20, and W20, the brief highlights pathways for aligning global frameworks with African priorities.

For African economies, industrial decarbonisation has been positioned as a developmental opportunity that can be leveraged to address broader socio-economic development goals. Industrialisation remains central to the African Union's Agenda 2063, the African Climate Change Strategy (2022–2032) [1], and the African Union Green Recovery Action Plan (2021–2027), all of which emphasise green growth, climate-resilient infrastructure, and the leapfrogging of carbon-intensive pathways.

The F20 Recommendation 2, aligns closely with the African Union Green Recovery Action Plan (GRAP) 2021–2027, which emphasises investments in renewable energy systems, energy efficiency, sustainable waste management, and resilient infrastructure, all of which directly underpin the decarbonisation of heavy industries such as cement, steel, and chemicals. The GRAP's commitment to mobilising climate finance and leveraging partnerships with multilateral institutions also aligns with the F20's recommendations to scale investment through blended finance, green bonds, and impact-focused partnerships. By advancing low-carbon industrialisation while simultaneously safeguarding livelihoods through just transition frameworks, the GRAP provide a more detailed roadmap of many of the principles embedded in F20's call for a justice-focused policy framework, demonstrating the potential for African priorities to shape and accelerate global industrial decarbonisation efforts [2]. At the same time, the industrial decarbonisation agenda that crystallised across BRICS, COP, and the G20 in 2025 further reinforces this alignment while exposing areas where global frameworks are still evolving.

1 African Union Climate Change and Resilient Development Strategy and Action Plan (2022-2032) - https://au.int/en/documents/20220628/african-union-climate-change-and-resilient-development-strategy-and-action-plan
2 African Union Green Recovery Action Plan 2021-2027 - https://au.int/en/documents/20210715/african-union-green-recovery-action-plan-2021-2027
3 Understanding the African Group of Negotiators in the multilateral negotiations on climate change - https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10220461.2024.2357327
5 Created by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the SDR is not a currency but an international reserve asset. Think of it as a potential claim on the freely usable currencies (like the US dollar, euro, yen, and pound sterling) of IMF member countries. The IMF allocates SDRs to its members based on their quotas (which roughly reflect their size in the global economy) to provide liquidity to the global economic system and supplement member countries' official reserves.
During the COVID-19 pandemic, a historic allocation of SDR 456 billion (equivalent to about $650 billion at the time) was made to help countries cope with the crisis. However, because the allocation is quota-based, wealthier nations received the lion's share, while the countries most in need, including those in Africa, received a much smaller portion.

BRICS' 2025–2030 Energy Cooperation Roadmap places unprecedented emphasis on accelerating advanced technologies for hard-to-abate sectors , including green hydrogen, Carbon Capture Utilization and Storage (CCUS), electrification of industrial heat, and bio-based industrial feedstocks, alongside skills development and domestic manufacturing to support just and inclusive transitions.

Similarly, the G20's 2025 Declaration established industrial decarbonisation as a top-tier priority, emphasising coordinated standards for green steel and cement, cross-border carbon measurement, and expanded cooperation on clean energy supply chains. However, while these global platforms recognise the urgency of decarbonising heavy industry, they remain less explicit about the justice dimensions foregrounded in the F20 and embedded deeply in the AU GRAP, particularly the protection of workers, localisation of value chains, and community participation in transition planning. Together, the convergence of BRICS technology-led cooperation, G20 standard-setting, COP commitments on industrial transition pathways, and Africa's justice-centred GRAP demonstrates both the momentum and the gaps: momentum in the strategic shift toward low-carbon industrialisation, and gaps where equity, livelihoods, and inclusive governance must be more firmly integrated to deliver truly transformative, climate-resilient industrial futures.

These agenda's fit well within Africa's negotiating position within the UNFCCC, articulated through the African Group of Negotiators (AGN), which has consistently called for scaled-up finance, technology transfer, and equity-centred approaches to industrial transitions [3]. The challenge lies in ensuring that global commitments, such as those advanced through the G20, support African priorities of structural transformation, job creation, and resilience while avoiding new forms of dependency in global value chains.

Building on this alignment, the G20's growing emphasis on industrial decarbonisation, green value-chain standards, and transition finance presents a strategic entry point for the African Group of Negotiators to shape global rule-setting at the UNFCCC. The AGN can leverage the momentum generated through the G20 to reinforce long-standing African priorities at COP, particularly predictable finance for industrial transformation, concessional capital for grid expansion, and technology access without restrictive intellectual property barriers. The increasing convergence between G20 technical workstreams and African positions on just transitions also opens opportunities for the AGN to advocate for safeguards that ensure Africa's industrialisation is not undermined by emerging global standards on carbon intensity and "green" products.

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6 Solar Power and new concrete applications: a pilot plant in Morocco - Morocco's solar-powered cement and steel pilot projects

7 The world's largest solar power plant built with Industeel's stainless steel - https://europe.arcelormittal.com/newsandmedia/europenews/news-2018/NoorIII

8 400kW hybrid waste-to-energy power plant a first for Ghana - https://www.esi-africa.com/energy-efficiency/400kw-hybrid-waste-to-energy-power-plant-a-first-for-ghana/#:~:text=Ghana%20has%20inaugurated%20its%20first,blue%20print%20for%20further%20projects.

By strategically engaging G20 member states who also sit within key negotiating blocs at the UNFCCC, the AGN can amplify calls for equitable carbon accounting frameworks, differentiated transition pathways, and integrated support for skills development and local manufacturing. In this way, the G20 becomes not only a complementary platform but also a leverage point through which African negotiators can shape COP outcomes that genuinely reflect the continent's development and climate priorities.

G20 Developments under the South African Presidency

The South African G20 Presidency has provided an important platform for advancing F20's call for industrial decarbonisation. The Finance Track Communiqué committed members to scaling clean energy technologies, supporting carbon markets, and promoting industrial transformation in hard-to-abate sectors.

The Finance Track Communiqué underscores the central role of Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) in scaling finance for sustainable development, with the implementation of the G20 MDB Roadmap and the Capital Adequacy Framework (CAF) expected to significantly increase lending capacity over the coming decade. For Africa, where access to affordable finance remains a major barrier to industrial decarbonisation, these developments are particularly significant. By enabling MDBs to share more risk with the private sector, adopt innovative financial instruments, and leverage blended finance, African countries can mobilise the resources needed to modernise industrial infrastructure, adopt low-carbon technologies, and invest in energy-efficient manufacturing. This directly supports F20 Recommendation 2, which calls for investment in grid modernisation, electrification, and sector-specific decarbonisation roadmaps to accelerate the transition of heavy industries such as cement, steel, and chemicals.

Taken together, the 2025 G20 outcomes, the AU's strategic climate and industrial transformation frameworks, and the BRICS 2025–2030 Energy Cooperation Roadmap reveal a widening zone of alignment around affordable finance, technological sovereignty, and equitable energy transitions. Throughout the 2025 presidency, South Africa used its dual leadership roles in the G20 and BRICS to foreground priorities shared across the Global South, most notably the need for diversified energy mixes, regionally integrated power systems, responsible mineral value chains, and transition pathways that preserve policy space for domestic industrialisation.

The G20 Finance Communiqué's emphasis on strengthening debt sustainability, enhancing Special Drawing Rights (SDR) channelling [5], and increasing the representation of African economies in global financial institutions aligns not just broadly with climate priorities, but directly with the operational foundations of the African Union's Green Recovery Action Plan (GRAP).For instance, the GRAP prioritises ambitious initiatives like the "Great Green Wall" and the "African Green Stimulus Programme," which aim to restore degraded ecosystems, create millions of green jobs, and build climate-resilient infrastructure. These are not mere projects but strategic investments in continental stability. Yet, as the African Development Bank notes, Africa faces an annual climate finance gap of over $100 billion. By promoting predictable, coordinated debt frameworks through the G20 Common Framework and endorsing the lessons from initial cases, the G20 can directly enable GRAP implementation. A successful debt treatment for a country like Ethiopia (as welcomed in the Communiqué) is not an end in itself; it is a means to an end. The fiscal space created by such relief can be redirected from debt servicing to funding a nation's contribution to the Great Green Wall, investing in sustainable agriculture that prevents desertification, or installing renewable energy to power green industries, all core pillars of the GRAP.

The final G20 Declaration reflects these influences, particularly in its emphasis on technological neutrality, local manufacturing, skills development, grid resilience, and voluntary but coordinated transition planning. These themes strongly echo the BRICS Roadmap, which stresses the importance of shared research platforms, fossil-to-clean transition strategies tailored to national circumstances, and expanded cooperation on storage, renewables, and advanced decarbonisation technologies. At the same time, the Declaration's focus on concessional finance, risk-mitigating instruments, and strengthened MDB mandates directly complements the AU and AGN's long-standing calls for scaled-up finance, debt relief, and equitable access to technology. This convergence suggests a growing diplomatic ecosystem in which African and BRICS priorities collectively shape global negotiation spaces (from the G20 to COP) ensuring that just, inclusive, and development-centred energy transitions remain firmly on the world's agenda.

These G20 finance commitments can be translated into tangible outcomes through Africa's emerging green industrial projects. For example, South Africa's green hydrogen and ammonia initiatives stand to benefit from MDB blended finance and de-risking instruments, enabling private sector participation in decarbonising energy-intensive industries. Similarly, Morocco's solar-powered cement [6] and steel pilot [7] projects demonstrate how access to concessional finance and technical support can reduce emissions while maintaining industrial output. The F20 calls to action under recommendation 2 related to the development of a clear, globally recognised definition for "green" industrial products, such as green steel or green cement, directly aligns with Africa's immense potential to become a powerhouse for low-carbon industrial production. The continent boasts abundant renewable energy resources and critical mineral reserves essential for modern manufacturing. By building new industrial capacity from the ground up according to these high standards, African nations can leapfrog outdated technologies and position their exports as premium, sustainable products in international markets. This creates a powerful competitive advantage, attracting investment from corporations signed up to initiatives like RE100 (committed to 100% renewable electricity) who are seeking to decarbonise their supply chains. It ensures that Africa's participation in global value chains is not as a mere extractor of raw materials, but as a valued manufacturer of low-carbon goods, capturing more economic value on the continent.

Conclusion

The 2025 South African G20 Presidency has created an unprecedented platform to align global climate ambition with Africa's developmental imperatives, while simultaneously bridging priorities emerging from the AU, the AGN, and the expanding BRICS cooperation framework. As this brief has demonstrated, the F20's call for a just and inclusive approach to industrial decarbonisation strongly reinforces Africa's own long-term development trajectories articulated in Agenda 2063, the African Climate Change Strategy, and the Green Recovery Action Plan (GRAP). Decarbonising heavy industries such as cement, steel, and chemicals is not only a climate necessity; it is a strategic opportunity for Africa to build resilient economies, secure future-proof green jobs, and position itself competitively in global markets that increasingly demand low-carbon, sustainably produced goods. The South African Presidency's stewardship of the 2025 G20, combined with its influential role in shaping the BRICS Energy Cooperation Roadmap, has ensured that issues central to Africa's structural transformation are embedded throughout the final G20 Declaration. The Finance Track's push to scale MDB lending, operationalise the G20 Capital Adequacy Framework (CAF), strengthen debt sustainability, and expand African representation in global financial governance mirrors long-standing AGN priorities for predictable finance, technological access, and equitable transition pathways.

These shifts are more than technocratic refinements: they are foundational enablers of Africa's green industrial future. At the same time, the BRICS Roadmap's emphasis on technological neutrality, regional grid interconnection, skills development, and collaborative research platforms complements the G20's commitments and ensures that Global South perspectives, particularly those of African countries, shape global standards for energy transitions and industrial decarbonisation.

Realising this vision, however, depends on translating these global commitments into actionable and locally grounded investments. Africa requires concessional finance and risk-sharing mechanisms for projects that generate cross-cutting development gains including job creation and gender equity, SME participation, and community resilience. Equally, just transition frameworks must be fully operationalised to protect workers, mining communities, and energy-dependent regions during the shift to cleaner production. Effective implementation will hinge on coordinated engagement between national governments, MDBs, the private sector, and regional bodies such as the AU and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

In conclusion, advancing Africa's industrial decarbonisation agenda through the mechanisms shaped during the 2025 G20 Presidency represents both a test of global climate solidarity and a strategic investment in shared economic stability. By grounding global policies in the continent's realities (and by leveraging the growing convergence between the G20, BRICS, and AU frameworks) the international community can help accelerate a transformation that tackles climate risks while addressing Africa's enduring challenges of poverty, unemployment, and inequality. The South African Presidency has laid a coherent, globally aligned foundation; it is now incumbent upon G20 members and partners to work with Africa in building a low-carbon industrial base that is resilient, competitive, and deeply just.

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POLICY BRIEF 3

TRANSFORM THE GLOBAL FINANCIAL SYSTEM TO DRIVE CLIMATE AND DEVELOPMENT GOALS

AND

STRATEGICALLY ALIGN AND MOBILISE FLEXIBLE FINANCIAL RESOURCES WITH CLIMATE GOALS AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

INTRODUCTION

This policy brief focuses on F20 recommendation 3: Transform the Global Financial System to Drive Climate and Development Goals and F20 recommendation 4: Strategically Align and Mobilise Flexible Financial Resources with Climate Goals and Sustainable Development

Africa faces acute climate vulnerability, growing debt burdens, and significant gaps in financing for sustainable development. Despite contributing less than 4% of global greenhouse gas emissions, Africa is disproportionately affected by climate change, with rising temperatures and extreme weather threatening its economy and population [1]. The continent needs an estimated $250 billion annually between 2020 and 2030 to implement its climate goals, but has historically received significantly less than other regions, particularly for adaptation [2]. Current global financial structures often limit African representation in decision-making, reduce access to concessional finance, and fail to adequately integrate climate and social risks into debt sustainability analyses [3].

In this context, the strategic mobilisation of innovative and flexible financial resources becomes central to closing Africa's climate finance gap and ensuring that investments are socially inclusive, resilient, and aligned with the continent's development priorities.

The F20 Recommendation 3 calls for reforming international financial institutions (IFIs), expanding access to liquidity, and mobilising innovative finance to align global financial flows with climate and development goals. The DWG's focus on inclusive and resilient development through social protection floors complements this approach. SDR-backed finance can be intentionally directed toward projects that strengthen social protection and support historically excluded communities, including women, Indigenous Peoples, and economically disadvantaged groups, ensuring that macro-level financial instruments translate into equitable, on-the-ground outcomes.

Priorities outlined in the G20 Finance Track Communique underscore the need for innovative financial instruments, enhanced liquidity support, and equitable access to concessional financing for vulnerable economies. South Africa's G20 Presidency has been highlighting the need for Special Drawing Rights (SDR) channelling, which has emerged as a critical, innovative mechanism within international finance, offering a direct pathway to address Africa's intertwined challenges of debt sustainability and climate finance. In essence, it is a recycling process where countries with strong reserves, typically wealthier nations, voluntarily lend their allocated SDRs, an international reserve asset created by the IMF, to be on-lent through trusted institutions to vulnerable economies.

This process is vital because it provides African nations with access to financing that does not exacerbate their debt burdens. Unlike commercial loans, SDRs channelled through institutions like the IMF's Resilience and Sustainability Trust (RST) or the African Development Bank (AfDB) offer highly concessional terms, including very low interest rates and long grace periods. This creates essential fiscal space for governments to invest in climate resilience and green energy without the fear of compounding their existing debt crises.

The true transformative potential of SDR channelling for Africa lies in its financial leverage, as well as in the governance and political leadership that underpin its deployment. When channelled through MDBs, and particularly the African Development Bank (AfDB), SDRs can be distributed as concessional loans as well as strategically converted into capital that multiplies their impact. The AfDB can use these resources to unlock three to four times their value from private sector investors who are reassured by the strength of this capital base [4] The effectiveness of this model depends on strong African political leadership - both at the national level, where governments must ensure that investments are directed toward inclusive, locally relevant priorities, and at the continental level, where the African Union Commission (AUC) plays a critical coordinating role.

By aligning SDR-backed finance with continental frameworks such as the AU's Green Recovery Action Plan, and by reinforcing governance standards that promote transparency, accountability, and citizen participation, Africa can transform what would otherwise be a static reserve asset into a dynamic, large-scale investment for its climate as well as broader development and service delivery priorities. This capital can fund ambitious, climate-aligned projects central to Africa's development agenda, such as the African Union's Green Recovery Action Plan, the Great Green Wall initiative, or massive solar power projects under the Desert to Power programme. By providing affordable, scalable finance for these initiatives, SDR channelling shifts the narrative from reactive debt relief to proactive investment in a sustainable and resilient economic future for the continent. For example, F20 Recommendation 4 emphasises the strategic mobilisation of flexible, accessible, and community-oriented finance. SDR channelling, when combined with concessional loans, blended finance, and simplified application procedures, provides precisely this flexibility. By lowering technical, financial, and legal barriers, such mechanisms can enable local stakeholders to access resources directly, in line with the DWG's call for inclusive development and social protection, and the Finance Track's focus on scalable, sustainable finance.

1 Laying the Ground for Scaling up Climate Finance in Sub-Saharan Africa - https://www.elibrary.imf.org/view/journals/001/2025/099/article-A001-en.xml#
2 Landscape of Climate Finance in Africa 2024 - https://www.climatepolicyinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Landscape-of-Climate-Finance-in-Africa-2024.pdf
3 As Africa Assumes G20 Leadership, Strengthening African Financial Systems Key to Global Financial Reforms - https://g20.org/news/as-africa-assumes-g20-leadership-strengthening-african-financial-systems-key-to-global-financial-reforms/#:~:text=Africa's%20relationship%20with%20the%20global%20financial%20system,stringent%20conditions%20imposed%20by%20international%20financial%20institutions.
4 Africa Investment Forum Market Days 2024: AfDB, DBSA and institutional investors sign agreement for new African multi-originator synthetic securitization platform - https://www.africainvestmentforum.com/en/news/press-releases/africa-investment-forum-market-days-2024-afdb-dbsa-and-institutional-investors#:~:text=The%20multi%2Doriginator%20synthetic%20securitization,to%20address%20Africa's%20financing%20gaps.%E2%80%9D

The DWG's focus on inclusive and resilient development through social protection floors complements this approach. SDR-backed finance can be intentionally directed toward projects that strengthen social protection and support historically excluded communities, including women, and economically disadvantaged groups thereby ensuring that macro-level financial instruments translate into equitable, on-the-ground outcomes. Moreover, the DWG's discussion on voluntary and non-binding high-level principles for combatting illicit financial flows aligns with broader recommendations to mobilise innovative finance while safeguarding African sovereignty and domestic policy priorities. Careful integration of IFF considerations can enhance resource mobilisation for climate action without imposing externally mandated frameworks that could conflict with national strategies.

These commitments are deeply embedded within previous processes, beginning with the 2009 Pittsburgh Summit commitment to phase out inefficient fossil fuel subsidies, to the 2010 Seoul Development Consensus on inclusive growth, the 2021 Rome Declaration on sustainable finance, and the 2023 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration emphasising debt sustainability and reform of international financial institutions. For Africa, these global milestones have often intersected with parallel continental commitments under international law and treaty frameworks, most notably the ratification of the Paris Agreement by all 54 African Union (AU) member states, alongside Africa's active participation in the Doha Amendment to the Kyoto Protocol and ongoing negotiations under the UNFCCC. These commitments have also reinforced regional initiatives such as the African Renewable Energy Initiative (AREI), the Africa Adaptation Initiative, and the African Union's Agenda 2063, all of which seek to translate global climate goals into locally relevant development pathways.

Deepening these commitments through calls for large-scale liquidity from SDRs and MDBs can help provide the capital foundation, while flexible, locally-directed financing ensures that investments are inclusive, community-driven, and resilient. In the African context, this has meant aligning G20 outcomes with instruments such as the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, which enshrines environmental rights, and the African Union's Climate Change and Resilient Development Strategy (2022–2032), which binds member states to coordinated action. At a national level, several African countries have advanced constitutional and legislative frameworks, such as Kenya's Climate Change Act, South Africa's Just Energy Transition Investment Plan, and Nigeria's Climate Change Act—that not only domesticate treaty obligations but also link them to just transition imperatives.

This alignment builds on a long-standing G20 legacy, but Africa's participation and commitments demonstrate how global summits can generate momentum for legal ratifications, treaty implementation, and policy innovation at regional and national levels.

Crucially, they also highlight Africa's insistence that global commitments must be matched by equitable access to finance and technology transfer, enabling African countries to operationalise their international obligations in a way that strengthens sovereignty, accelerates local development, and fosters climate and energy democracy.

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F20

POLICY BRIEF 4

STRENGTHENING COUNTRY PLATFORMS FOR EFFECTIVE DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION IN AFRICA

INTRODUCTION

This policy brief focuses on F20 recommendation 7: Strengthen Country Platforms for Effective Development Cooperation in Africa

The F20 recommendation to "Strengthen Country Platforms for Effective Development Cooperation" presents a critical framework for addressing critical ordinary issues within the climate investment and governance space. As a governance tool, country platforms have the potential to strengthen democratic processes in the climate governance space with the potential to increase transparency and accountability through shared and mutually agreed on development priorities and progress measurement frameworks [1]. Examples of country platforms in Africa include South Africa's Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP), Egypt's NWFE platform, and Senegal's JETP, which mobilise finance for national development and climate goals. Other countries like Kenya2 and Nigeria are also exploring such initiatives, often with support from organisations like the African Climate Foundation [3]. These platforms are designed to be country-led, aligning various public and private stakeholders to create investment-ready projects and strengthen domestic delivery capacity.

For African nations, country platforms are a strategic necessity for achieving the scale and coherence required to implement continental blueprints like Agenda 2063, the African Union Green Recovery Action Plan (GRAP), and Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).

This brief explores the application of this F20 recommendation within the African context, positioning well-designed, African-owned country platforms as a pathway for dismantling siloed interventions, align international support with national priorities, and ultimately accelerate a just and inclusive transition.

The current model of development cooperation often fails to meet Africa's needs. Project fragmentation is widespread with a plethora of disconnected, donor-driven initiatives that can overwhelm government capacity and create parallel implementation structures that strain administrative systems [4]. Funding is frequently misaligned with national priorities or continental frameworks, meaning that resources may not reinforce long-term strategic objectives. Limited domestic capacity exacerbates these challenges [5], as governments often lack the personnel, expertise, or coordination mechanisms to manage dozens of bilateral and multilateral partners effectively and in a coordinated fashion. In addition, thematic silos persist, including climate finance, development aid, and private investment which are too often managed separately, preventing integrated, cross-cutting solutions.

Country platforms offer a potential solution by establishing a single, country-led table around which development priorities can be set and achieved by centralising dialogue, planning, and financing, and ensuring all actors cooperate toward shared objectives. By consolidating fragmented efforts into a coherent, country-led framework, country platforms create the political and institutional space for democratic participation in climate and energy decision-making.

Unlike donor-driven projects that bypass national systems, country platforms enable governments to set priorities in alignment with citizen needs, regional strategies, and long-term development goals, thereby creating an accountability mechanism between citizens and governments, instead of fragmented external development actors. When designed inclusively, they have the potential to bring together both international partners, as well as domestic stakeholders such as civil society, local communities, trade unions, and the private sector, as well as the sub-national government actors who will be ultimately responsible for operationalising development investment, including climate finance, development aid, and private investment, not at the local level. In this way, country platforms can advance climate and energy democracy by redistributing power in decision-making, embedding accountability, and fostering a just transition that reflects the lived realities of African societies.

The F20's three-pronged approach under recommendation 7 has some valuable touch points to Africa's context, leveraging continental strengths while addressing these systemic weaknesses.

1

Institutionalising African-owned and -led country platforms is central to this vision. Platforms should be anchored in existing structures, such as national planning bodies or climate coordination units, to prevent duplication and ensure sustainability.

2

They must also explicitly integrate continental frameworks, including the GRAP and Agenda 2063, so that local actions reinforce broader goals such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the Great Green Wall initiative. Sub-national leadership is crucial in Africa's rapidly urbanising context, and platforms should formally include mayors and regional governors to coordinate climate action in urban transport, waste management, and resilient infrastructure, drawing lessons from networks such as C40 Cities.

3

Equally, platforms must formalise youth inclusion by securing representation for national youth councils and climate activist groups, ensuring that Africa's largest demographic shapes long-term planning.

Enhancing financial coordination and mobilising African capital remains a critical priority, and the G20 provides new opportunities to advance this agenda.

In African contexts, country platforms should create thematic pooled funds, such as the "Renewable Energy for Industrialisation Fund" or a "Climate-Resilient Agriculture Fund", which reduce transaction costs for governments and enable larger, strategic investments. The G20's Finance Track has signalled growing support for direct-access finance windows, public-private de-risking facilities, and blended instruments that can channel resources toward national priorities, creating a direct link between global capital and African-led programmes. African philanthropy and domestic institutional investors, including pension funds controlling billions in assets, represent a significant but underutilised source of patient capital; country platforms can engage these actors to co-invest and de-risk international finance, ensuring that wealth generated in Africa is reinvested locally. Integrating risk and resilience into development strategies is equally important.

Under South Africa's G20 Presidency, the breadth of climate-focused initiatives across both government working groups and engagement groups demonstrates a continued commitment to advancing energy transitions in line with Recommendation 1 of the Foundations 20 (F20): "Taking Action to Foster Economic Prosperity through a Just and Inclusive Shift to Renewable Energy."

The SA G20 Presidency's agenda, deeply committed to further both local and regional energy access agendas, therefore, focuses on three key priority areas: 1) enhancing energy security and universal access, 2) ensuring transitions are just and affordable for fossil-fuel-dependent communities, and 3) advancing African interconnectivity through projects like the African Single Electricity Market (AfSEM). By building on the frameworks established by Indonesia, India, and Brazil, South Africa aims to bridge the global energy inequality gap and position the G20 to support a transition that is both climate-conscious and development-focused for the African continent. The challenge is to ensure that global reforms and financing mechanisms align with Africa's priorities, enabling it to leapfrog into a sustainable energy future rather than replicating past extractive models. Green industrialisation can stimulate economic growth, create millions of quality jobs, and open new avenues for trade and development by fostering new sectors like green hydrogen and sustainable agriculture.[3] [4] [5]

This is also true for sentiments emerging from official engagement groups of the South African G20 Presidency. For example, under the B20's Energy Mix and Just Transitions Working Group, de-risking renewable investments in the Global South and advancing inclusive growth through green and digital transitions has emerged as a key priority. The recently published Labour 20 recommendations call for "Decent job creation should be promoted through strong investments in job-rich climate-friendly sectors such as infrastructure development, the digital and green economy, and the care economy with governments as key players" although specific reference to the energy sector isn't made.

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In August, T20 Task Force 5 on "Accelerating Climate Action and the Just Energy Transition" published their final statement which provided a direct and substantive research-backed framing of the climate and energy transitions conetx and was highly complimentary to the F20 Recommendation on fostering prosperity through a just shift to renewable Specifically, the T20's Task Force 5's focus on de-risking investments and mobilising private finance addresses the F20's call for reforming international financial institutions. Its proposals for local value addition and skills development directly respond to the F20's emphasis on leveraging Africa's critical minerals and youth demographic for local benefit, not just extraction. Furthermore, the T20's rigorous work on "just transition" principles and social protection mechanisms offers the precise policy frameworks needed to implement the F20's core demand for an inclusive transition that aligns global climate goals with African socio-economic realities, thereby bridging the gap between ambition and actionable policy.

Emerging opportunities for furthering Africa's energy transition agendas

Concrete commitments emerging from the G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors' meeting in Durban provide a critical opportunity to strengthen African country platforms as vehicles for delivering climate and energy transitions. The decision to implement the Capital Adequacy Framework to unlock over $300 billion in new Multilateral Development Bank (MDB) lending can be channelled into nationally defined transition plans, enabling governments to integrate renewable energy expansion and infrastructure development directly into their country platform roadmaps. Similarly, agreements to reinforce debt relief through the Common Framework and the IMF's Resilience and Sustainability Trust (RST) create fiscal space for African states to embed inclusive energy strategies into their development financing frameworks, ensuring that platforms are not just planning tools but also backed by resources. The pledges on blended finance, carbon markets, and natural catastrophe insurance, if equitably designed, can be institutionalised within country platforms to help de-risk investments, crowd in private capital, and build resilience around country-led priorities.

Parallel developments in the Development Working Group at Skukuza strengthen the social dimension of country platforms by anchoring them in inclusivity and protection. The Call to Action on Universal Social Protection, which emphasises climate-resilient and shock-responsive systems, provides a framework for governments to integrate social safeguards into their transition plans. This ensures that vulnerable groups—including informal and migrant workers—are not left behind as economies restructure towards low-carbon growth. By embedding these commitments within country platforms, African states can present comprehensive and bankable transition strategies that balance fiscal discipline, social equity, and climate ambition.

Finally, the adoption of principles to combat illicit financial flows complements these efforts by securing domestic revenues that can flow directly into country platforms, strengthening their credibility and sustainability. The proposal for an Ubuntu Commission to advance the financing of Global Public Goods further highlights the need to institutionalise African perspectives within these platforms, embedding solidarity and equity as guiding principles. Together, these developments create the conditions for country platforms to become the primary vehicles for aligning international commitments, mobilising finance, and delivering just, inclusive energy transitions across the continent.

The robust policy advice emerging from the T20 working group on Accelerating Climate Action and the Just Energy Transition provides a comprehensive intellectual and actionable policy framework to materially advance the objectives outlined in F20 Recommendation 1. Crucially, the T20's call for the development of new global governance frameworks for critical minerals supply chains speaks directly to Africa's pivotal, yet historically challenging, role as a primary supplier of resources essential for global renewable technologies. By insisting on principles of equitable value-sharing, local beneficiation, and the implementation of the highest environmental, social, and governance (ESG) safeguards, the T20's recommendations move beyond mere extraction. They actively support a transformative, African-led approach to green industrialisation, ensuring that the continent captures more of the economic upside from its natural endowment through on-shore processing and manufacturing, thereby creating jobs and building resilient domestic industries. Concurrently, its effort to define comprehensive and context-sensitive "just transition" taxonomies provides the necessary clarity for international financial institutions and private investors to direct capital towards projects that genuinely uphold social equity, protect workers' rights, and foster community engagement.

In addition, T20 Task Force 5 recommendations on integrated of nature-based solutions into energy transition planning further reinforces the holistic necessity of designing transitions that prioritise the health of people and the resilience of ecosystems as non-negotiable components of sustainable economic growth, rather than as secondary considerations.

Taken together, these interconnected initiatives from the T20 illustrate the multifaceted strategy through which the South African G20 Presidency has successfully positioned the forum as a critical driver of structural reforms. By championing these evidence-based proposals, the presidency is pushing the G20 to move beyond rhetorical support and towards creating the concrete enabling conditions, in finance, governance, and industrial policy, that can empower Africa to seize its immense potential. This effort is fundamentally aligned with F20's vision, demonstrating a clear pathway for the continent to advance a uniquely just, inclusive, and prosperous renewable energy future on its own terms.

Conclusion

F20's Recommendation 1, which calls for fostering economic prosperity through a just and inclusive shift to renewable energy, speaks directly to Africa's current development trajectory. With abundant renewable resources, a youthful workforce, and ambitious continental strategies such as Agenda 2063, Africa is well positioned to harness the energy transition as a driver of industrialisation, job creation, and sustainable growth. Yet, realising this potential requires addressing financing barriers, ensuring social protection, and embedding justice and equity at the core of transition policies. The recent outcomes of the South African G20 Presidency highlight that global frameworks are increasingly aligning with these priorities, offering a timely opportunity for Africa to shape and benefit from the transition. By grounding the energy shift in inclusivity and resilience, Africa can not only meet its domestic development needs but also assert itself as a global leader in advancing climate and energy justice.

1 Country Platforms: the key to aligning national development priorities and climate goals? - https://odi.org/en/about/our-work/country-platforms/#:~:text=One%20of%20the%20highlights%20of,private%20investment%20for%20climate%20action.https://odi.org/en/about/our-work/country-platforms/#:~:text=One%20of%20the%20highlights%20of,private%20investment%20for%20climate%20action.

2 The ACF has explored Adaptation and Resilience Investment Platforms (ARIPs) in Kenya, focusing on the insurance sector's role in managing climate risks and informing the development of these platforms -

3 Country investment platforms: concrete outcomes that impact the real economy - https://africanclimatefoundation.org/blog/country-investment-platforms-concrete-outcomes-that-impact-the-real-economy/#:~:text=There's%20been%20a%20positive%20shift%20in%20the,our%20work%20around%20selected%20country%20investment%20platforms.

4 Donor fragmentation and bureaucratic quality in aid recipients - https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0304387806000162#:~:text=However%2C%20where%20there%20are%20numerous,possible%20reforms%20in%20aid%20delivery.

MEET OUR CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE PROGRAMME TEAM

Climate and Environmental Governance Lead: Raisa Cole

Raisa Cole is an intersectional environmental feminist committed to leveraging climate change focused investments to address broader development priorities. She brings with her, 10 years of experience in adaptation policy and practice, an MSc in International Cooperation and Urban Development, and a commitment to decolonial research and practice. She is currently completing her PhD in adaptation governance across Africa.

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With over 20 years of international experience across more than 15 countries, Ujen is a seasoned professional with a strong background in governancUjen holds an undergraduate degree in Sociology and Psychology, as well as an Honours degree in Social Development. e, leadership development, climate action, and human rights.

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