



**G20** SOCIAL  
SOUTH  
AFRICA 2025



**Children20**

## **Children20 Policy Pack (Version 9)**

### **Investing in Children in a Time of Polycrisis**

Prepared under the South African Presidency of the G20 (2025)

In continuity with the Children in G20 Initiative (Brazil 2024)

#### **Convened by**

Children20 Chairperson and Sherpa and Secretariat

#### **Supported By**

Children20 Sherpa Office, Children20 Secretariat and the Children20 Child Participation Committee.

#### **In Partnership With**

Child Rights Networks for Southern Africa (CRNSA), South African National Child Rights Coalition (SANCRRC), Nelson Mandela Children's Fund (NMCF), Give a Child a Family Africa (GCF), UNICEF South Africa, Save the Children South Africa (SCSA), Childline South Africa, Child Welfare South Africa, Graça Machel Trust, Hold My Hand, World Vision, Mtoto News (Kenya), Side-by-Side, SmartStart, Grow Great, Brave Movement, Show Me Your Number, #Keready, ChildFund International, SaveTNet Cyber Safety, Southern Africa Networks of Early Childhood Development (SANECD) and allied partners in collaboration with Civil20, Youth20 and Women20 under South Africa's G20 Presidency.



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## **PREFACE**

The Children20 Sherpa Office and Secretariat are honoured to present this contribution to the G20 Development Agenda under the South African Presidency of 2025. Building on Brazil's pioneering Children in G20 Initiative (2024), this document strengthens a growing global commitment to recognising children as active contributors to policy shaping, governance, and sustainable development.

Brazil's work demonstrated a simple truth: children are not passive recipients of policy. They are observers of injustice, holders of insight, and agents of change. Their participation enriches decision making and strengthens accountability.

South Africa's Presidency takes the next step by advancing a structured approach to child participation across the G20 Social Summit. Through the Children20 Pre-Summit and thematic processes leading into November 2025, children, civil society, development partners, and governments have collaborated to align lived experiences with policy priorities.

This contribution reflects shared commitments to solidarity, equality, sustainability, and South Africa's vision of a Social Summit rooted in inclusive governance. It also supports the transition toward the United States Presidency in 2026, ensuring continuity across Brazil, South Africa, and the United States.

South Africa's G20 leadership legacy should be defined by a sustained commitment to investing in the rights and wellbeing of mothers, children, and adolescents. These investments form the foundation of a more just, prosperous and sustainable world for all. At the heart of South Africa's Presidency is the recognition that human capital development, resilience and inclusive growth all depend on prioritising the rights and wellbeing of these groups, laying the groundwork for a more equitable future for every generation.

We express our appreciation to all partners and, most importantly, to the children whose leadership, clarity, and courage have made this work possible.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Children represent nearly one third of the global population, with more than half living in G20 countries. Yet their perspectives remain under-represented in decisions that shape economic stability, digital governance, climate action, and social protection. The Children20 seeks to close this gap by supporting structured, meaningful engagement between children and the G20.

This contribution integrates South Africa's five Social Summit themes with Brazil's six priority pillars to form an 11-theme framework addressing the realities facing children



today. The core message is clear: investment in children and their families and caregivers is essential to inclusive development, resilience, and long-term economic transformation.

## **Why the G20 Matters**

The G20 plays a central role in shaping global norms, directing development finance, coordinating multilateral institutions, and influencing national policy trajectories. Decisions taken at this level directly affect children's access to health care, education, digital safety, social protection, and climate resilience. Embedding child-centred considerations strengthens policy coherence and supports sustainable, people-centred growth.

## **Strategic Objectives**

The Children20 advances five interconnected objectives:

1. Strengthen child participation within existing G20 structures, particularly within the Social Summit track.
2. Co-create the Children20 Declaration, ensuring children's contributions directly inform policy discussions.
3. Promote intergenerational collaboration across all thematic areas.
4. Build capacity for children to participate safely, confidently, and effectively.
5. Mobilise sustainable financing for child-centred development, leveraging G20 leadership and multilateral systems.

These objectives position child rights not as a standalone sector, but as a cross-cutting dimension of economic reform, technological governance, climate action, health, and social justice.

The G20 was created to stabilise the global economy, enhance cooperation, and ensure coordinated responses to global challenges. As the world faces economic uncertainty, conflict, climate instability, and digital disruption, it is increasingly clear that sustainable development cannot be achieved without centring human wellbeing, particularly the wellbeing of children.

## **Why Children Must Be at the Core of Global Policy**

Children and their families and caregivers experience the consequences of global crises first and most severely. Whether through rising food and energy prices, unsafe



digital environments, extreme climate events, inadequate health systems, or uneven access to education, the impact on children is immediate and long-lasting. Integrating child-sensitive approaches strengthens long-term resilience, productivity, and social cohesion.

### **Building on Brazil's Pioneering Work**

Brazil's Children in G20 Initiative (2024) marked the first coordinated effort to embed child perspectives within G20 processes. It successfully documented child-rights gaps, proposed policy directions, and modelled new forms of participation. South Africa now extends this work from a pilot initiative to a structured policy and governance platform that positions child participation as an enduring feature of the G20 Social Summit.

### **South Africa's Contribution**

Under the theme *Our Future, Our Voice: Children20 for Solidarity, Equality and Sustainability*, South Africa advances an approach that aligns children's lived realities with institutional processes. This contribution is informed by child-led dialogues, evidence from global and regional organisations, and the shared commitment of partners across Africa and beyond.

The Children20 calls for a G20 ecosystem that:

- embeds child rights in economic and social frameworks
- adopts structured participation that is safe and meaningful
- strengthens intergenerational governance
- integrates safeguarding standards across all processes
- builds continuity between Brazil, South Africa, and the United States

### **PRIORITISED AGENDA**

To support constructive engagement with Sherpas and Ministers, the Children20 proposes a prioritised framework that balances ambition with political feasibility.

#### **Tier 1: High Political Feasibility and Strong G20 Alignment**

- Digital governance and AI safety
- Child-sensitive climate adaptation and resilience
- SDG acceleration and child-disaggregated data
- Integration of child mental health into health systems

#### **Tier 2: Medium Political Feasibility**

- Gender equality and protection





- Education quality and accessibility
- Human rights and civic participation

### **Tier 3: Long-Term Ambition**

- Institutionalisation of the Children20
- Global Children's Resilience Fund
- Child-sensitive due diligence in trade and value chains

This tiered approach supports realistic negotiation pathways while maintaining a long-term vision for embedding children's rights across G20 processes. Although presented in tiers, this is not a sequence to be followed step by step. It is a holistic and simultaneous agenda that recognises how children's rights intersect, reinforce one another and demand action across all fronts at the same time.

## **1. Digital Inclusion and Equitable Transformation**

*A digital world that is safe, fair and open to every child*

Technology helps children learn, communicate, and explore the world, yet many are still left behind. Children with special needs, children in rural areas, and those without devices or data face the greatest barriers.

Children want safe online spaces and rules that protect them from harmful content, scammers, and cybercrime, along with free or affordable internet in all communities, including rural and low-income areas. They call for digital lessons in school from the early grades, and child-friendly apps and websites designed to meet diverse needs. They want parents and teachers who understand technology and can guide them. They want South Africa and other countries to build their own technology so they are not always dependent on foreign companies, and for imported technologies to support learning without causing addiction or isolation. Technology should help children grow, not put them at risk.

## **2. Trade, Resilience and Inclusive Value Chains**

*Trade should help families, not harm children*

Trade affects food systems, family wellbeing, communities, and the environment. Sometimes trade brings benefits. Sometimes it brings harm.

Children have seen child labour in dangerous industries, mines that pollute water and air, illegal trading that exposes them to drugs and unsafe products, and parents working long hours with little time left for their families. They want trade rules that protect children's rights, safer markets and communities, lessons in school about



how trade works, and transparent value chains that do not harm people or the planet. Trade must support children, not exploit them.

### **3. Inclusive Climate Justice, Just Transition and Energy Democracy**

*We are growing up in a climate crisis we did not create*

Climate change affects every part of children's lives, including food, health, schooling, safety, and mental wellbeing. Families in unsafe areas are hardest hit by floods, heatwaves, and droughts, with rural and poor communities facing the greatest risks.

Children want clean water, clean air, and safe communities. They want climate lessons in schools, recycling and environmental programmes in every community, support for families after disasters, and renewable energy that creates green jobs. They want to be included in climate meetings and decisions, especially those with special needs and those in poorer or remote communities. With climate-related stress rising, especially in rural areas, they call for improved access to mental-health care, stronger links between climate and health training, more doctors trained on climate impacts, and an energy transition that builds African expertise and prevents brain drain. Climate justice must be fair and inclusive.

### **4. A Just and Sustainable Finance and International Financial Architecture**

*Money decisions should help children, not harm them*

Children shared that they were asked questions about international finance, yet these subjects are not taught in schools. They want financial education included in the curriculum so they can understand national budgets and global economic systems.

They want child-friendly national budget reports showing how much is spent on children, better targeting of funds toward programmes that work, and increased financing for schools, clinics, safety, and child-centred services. They call for stronger public-private partnerships to renovate schools and clinics, and systems that prevent fraud, corruption, and waste. They want inclusive infrastructure that supports children with special needs, widespread teaching of sign language and braille, and entrepreneurship education co-designed with CEOs, children, and curriculum advisors.

Children also want improved water and sanitation to prevent diseases like cholera, more schools to reduce overcrowding, and eco-friendly infrastructure able to



withstand climate shocks. They call for innovations in rural water systems, more psychosocial support centres, technology in schools for learners with special needs, and teachers, nurses, social workers, and police trained to support them. They want sustainable infrastructure and balanced budgeting that protects essential social spending.

They call on the IMF and World Bank to lower interest rates for developing countries so they can invest in education, healthcare, and child services that create safe, dignified conditions. Children thrive when national systems are strong and resilient, not struggling under debt.

## **5. Build Momentum for the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda**

*We want a world where the SDGs are real in our lives*

Most children do not know about the SDGs because they are not taught in school. They see rural communities being left behind, hunger and poverty, exclusion of children with special needs, short-term solutions instead of long-term change, symbolic participation in national spaces, and misuse of social grants. Stronger systems are needed to ensure social protection genuinely reaches children.

Children also see progress: school meals, food parcels, the first Children20 Pre-Summit, and increased student leadership at national level.

They want SDG lessons in classrooms, real spaces for participation, and more eco-friendly behaviour in communities. They call for menstrual health and sexual and reproductive health programmes, improved mental health support, and mass participation programmes that build dialogue. They want fair systems that stop corruption, strong partnerships between government, families, and children, and SDG-aligned learning methods beyond traditional approaches. They want financing to help schools and communities understand the SDGs, South Africa to strengthen global partnerships and share technology, policy changes that directly affect their lives, and more hospitals built. Their message is clear: nothing about us, without us.

### **Important Issues Children Agree With from the Brazil G20 Policy Pack**

- Children need counsellors, trained teachers, and safe places to talk.
- No child should go hungry; school meals must expand.
- Schools must be safe, inclusive, and properly funded.
- Gender-based violence must end; girls and all gender-diverse children must be supported.
- Every child deserves clean water, sanitation, and good healthcare.



- Children must be free to speak, organise, and be involved in decisions that affect their lives.

### **Our Cross-Cutting Principles**

Real child participation.

Strong safeguarding.

Honest accountability.

### **Our Call to G20 Leaders**

We do not want symbolic participation.

We want real power to shape our world.

Listen to us.

Work with us.

Build the future with us.

**Our future is our voice. Our voice is now.**

<b>Children's Priority</b>	<b>G20 Thematic Area</b>	<b>Proposed G20 Action</b>
Digital safety	Digital Economy WG	Child Impact Due Diligence Guidance
Climate resilience	Climate / Energy	Child-sensitive NDC guidance
Mental health	Health WG	Integration into PHC commitments
Poverty & Food	Finance WG / DWG	Support for nutrition financing
Education	Ed WG (where present)	SDG4 implementation support

## **BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE**

The G20 was conceived to stabilise the global economy and foster cooperation on finance, trade, and development. Yet, in the midst of multiple, overlapping crises, from pandemics to climate shocks and deepening digital inequality, it has become clear that economic stability cannot exist without social justice and human development. Children and their families and caregivers sit at the intersection of these realities. They are the most affected by today's decisions and the least represented in making them.

### **Crisis Lens: Why Children Are Central to Global Stability**



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The current geopolitical landscape, including inflationary pressures, digital conflict, climate migration, and rising food insecurity, disproportionately affects children. Child-sensitive approaches strengthen national resilience, social cohesion, and long-term human capital. Embedding children in G20 responses ensures that crisis recovery strategies support sustainable development rather than deepen inequalities.

The Children in G20 Initiative launched by Brazil in 2024 marked the first global effort to systematically mainstream children's rights into the G20 agenda. It documented the impacts of hunger, poverty, climate change, and digital exclusion on children and issued comprehensive recommendations for G20 action. This South African contribution builds directly upon that foundation, affirming that we have heard Brazil and are carrying its work forward. Rather than recreating the wheel, we extend its reach from advocacy to institutionalisation.

### **A New Chapter Under South Africa's Presidency**

Under the theme *Our Future, Our Voice: Children20 for Solidarity, Equality and Sustainability*, the South African Presidency recognises that the future of the G20 depends on its ability to represent those who will inherit its outcomes. Children's participation is not symbolic, it is foundational to effective governance. It produces policies that are more responsive, innovative, and resilient.

This document is informed by the collective work of child-rights organisations across continents, including UNICEF, Save the Children, World Vision, the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund (NMCF), Childline South Africa, Mtoto News (Kenya), and the Southern Africa Networks of Early Childhood Development (SANECD). Their evidence shows that when children participate in policymaking, outcomes improve for entire communities.

### **The Children20 Calls for a Structural Commitment**

The Children20 urges the G20 to:

- embed child rights in all economic and social policy frameworks
- establish a permanent Children20 engagement group by 2026
- ensure that child participation and safeguarding standards guide future Social Summit processes
- foster intergenerational dialogue that connects children's lived experience to global decision making



By embracing these commitments, the G20 affirms that building a fair world and a sustainable planet demands nothing less than investing in children today, not tomorrow.

## **FORMAL SUBMISSION**

The Children20 recognises that the challenges facing children and their families and caregivers today — including economic precarity, conflict, digital risk, climate collapse, and shrinking civic space — are deeply interlinked. Each theme below integrates recommendations drawn from the Brazil 2024 Policy Pack, the South African Presidency framework, and insights from global and African child-rights networks. Across all themes, the emphasis is on children as participants in designing, implementing, and monitoring the solutions that shape their futures.

### **1. Thematic Priorities**

The eleven themes below form the backbone of the Children20's submission to the G20. They reflect the interconnected crises affecting children and propose coordinated G20 action that centres rights, equity, and meaningful participation.

#### **1.1 Digital Sovereignty, Artificial Intelligence and Inclusive Innovation**

The digital environment has become a new public sphere for children and their families and caregivers. It offers opportunities for learning, creativity, and civic engagement, yet exposes them to commercial exploitation, misinformation, and abuse. Building on Brazil's call for stronger digital governance, South Africa advances a rights-based digital compact to ensure technology serves children rather than exploits them.

#### **Key Priorities**

- Mandatory due-diligence standards for technology companies assessing child impact across design, deployment, and AI training data.
- Child-centred digital infrastructure, affordable access, age-appropriate design, strong privacy safeguards, and robust data-protection laws.
- Digital-literacy curricula co-developed with children to build resilience and agency online.
- A permanent G20 Observatory on Children in the Digital Environment to monitor compliance with the 2021 G20 High-Level Principles.
- Adequate helpline capacity and trained responders for victims of cybercrime.
- Support for families and caregivers to guide, protect, and participate alongside





children in digital spaces.

- Sustained investment in safe, inclusive digital futures.

Children's participation in digital-policy design — through peer educators, youth councils, and the Children20 Digital Lab — enables the G20 to model inclusive innovation that strengthens creativity, safety, and equality.

## **1.2 Financing the Future: Sustainable Investment and Infrastructure**

Economic recovery must translate into human development. Yet children remain largely invisible in fiscal planning, despite strong evidence that early investment yields the highest long-term social returns. Brazil's emphasis on fair and inclusive economic governance remains central. South Africa reaffirms this by calling for a financial architecture that protects fiscal space for child-centred development.

### **Key Priorities**

- **Integrate Child-Impact Assessments** across public-finance and infrastructure projects.
  - o Embed CIAs in national budget cycles, Integrated National Financing Frameworks (INFFs), procurement systems, and debt-restructuring processes; empower supreme audit institutions to track spending on children.
- **Establish Universal Child Benefits (UCBs)** as a minimum social-protection floor in all G20 Member States.
  - o Ensure macroeconomic frameworks, debt negotiations, and expenditure reviews protect spending that benefits children directly.
- **Reform sovereign-debt mechanisms** to safeguard fiscal space.
  - o Support a UN Framework Convention on Sovereign Debt; introduce disaster and pandemic pause clauses; ensure debt-sustainability assessments protect essential spending on health, education, nutrition, and protection.
- **Prioritise child-centred budgeting** in climate adaptation, digital transformation, and trade-related investments.
  - o Align climate finance and digital-transition strategies with child-focused objectives to prevent deepening inequalities.
- **Mobilise development banks and donors** to establish a Global Children's Resilience Fund using blended finance.
  - o Ensure accessibility to national and local governments, communities, and civil-society organisations.



- **Institutionalise meaningful child participation in budgeting.**

- o Support children's parliaments, youth budget panels, municipal advisory forums, and accessible fiscal transparency tools.

Child participation in budgeting transforms fiscal policy into a mechanism of equity rather than exclusion. A fair and sustainable international financial architecture must place children at its centre.

### **1.3 Climate Resilience and Just Energy Transition**

*(Inclusive Climate Justice, Just Transition, Just Finance, and Sustainable Finance)*

Climate change is the defining challenge of this generation. Ninety-nine percent of the world's children are exposed to at least one environmental hazard. These impacts threaten safety, health, learning, nutrition, and long-term opportunity.

#### **Key Priorities**

- Embed children's rights into NDCs, adaptation plans, and climate-finance frameworks.
- Ensure safe and meaningful child participation in climate negotiations and community-based adaptation.
- Invest in green-skills education — renewable energy, biodiversity, climate science — and support youth-led innovation.
- Expand adaptation finance with explicit child-centred social-protection components.
- Honour indigenous and traditional ecological knowledge.
- Equip families and caregivers to strengthen resilience and participate in climate planning.
- Strengthen disaster-preparedness and early-warning systems with provisions for children, including those with disabilities.

#### **Participation as a Catalyst**

Structured climate-participation pathways — from school eco-clubs to municipal climate councils — transform awareness into ownership, and align local insights with global policy.

### **1.4 Advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

Halfway to 2030, children remain at high risk of being left behind. Progress across poverty, hunger, health, gender equality and education is uneven, with rural, marginalised, and conflict-affected communities facing the steepest challenges.





## Key Priorities

- Strengthen child-specific SDG indicators (age, gender, disability, geography, income).
- Establish National SDG Forums with structured, safe child participation.
- Develop a G20-wide *Generation 2030 Compact* measuring SDG progress through outcomes for children.
- Align national SDG monitoring with Agenda 2063 and regional child-rights instruments.

### 1.5 Trade, Resilience and Inclusive Value Chains

Trade policies shape employment, food systems, ecological sustainability, and household resilience, yet rarely measure impacts on children.

## Key Priorities

- Enact binding due-diligence frameworks to eliminate exploitative child labour and unsafe informal work.
- Provide support to families and small producers affected by shifts in trade.
- Introduce social clauses ensuring access to protection, schooling, and nutrition during trade transitions.
- Incentivise ethical, circular, and fair-wage value chains.
- Strengthen consumer-protection systems for children in digital and e-commerce markets.

Embedding social safeguards in trade architecture ensures economic growth uplifts rather than exploits children.

### 1.6 Mental Health and Wellbeing

Mental health is a central determinant of child development and long-term wellbeing, yet remains one of the most underfunded areas of health systems worldwide.

## Key Priorities

- Integrate mental-health services into primary healthcare and education systems.
- Allocate at least 5 percent of national health budgets to mental health, including dedicated adolescent support.
- Scale community-based peer-support programmes, helplines, and digital counselling tools.
- Build capacity among families, caregivers, teachers, social workers, and frontline health workers.



- Invest in early prevention — nurturing care, safe relationships, and protective environments.

Meaningful participation strengthens agency, mitigates trauma, and improves mental-health outcomes.

### **1.7 Poverty and Food Security**

Child poverty undermines learning, health, dignity, and safety. Rising living costs, unemployment, and uneven social-protection systems intensify food insecurity.

#### **Key Priorities**

- Expand school-feeding programmes and nutrition grants.
- Increase income-support measures that meet or exceed food-poverty thresholds.
- Ensure budgetary support to prevent stunting, strengthen nurturing care, and enhance early development.
- Integrate mental-health and child-protection services into poverty-reduction strategies.
- Promote international cooperation for equitable food systems and stable pricing.
- Establish child-led monitoring platforms for school meals and community gardens.

Participation localises accountability and builds community ownership of hunger-response programmes.

### **1.8 Quality Education**

Education underpins human development, economic mobility, and democratic participation.

#### **Key Priorities**

- Recognise early-childhood education as a universal right and priority investment.
- Guarantee inclusive, anti-racist, child-centred curricula.
- Strengthen school infrastructure for safety, climate resilience, and accessibility.
- Promote Nature-Based Education.
- Finance education at UNESCO-recommended levels (4–6 percent of GDP or 15–20 percent of public expenditure).
- Position children as co-creators of knowledge; equip families to support learning.

### **1.9 Gender Equality and Inclusion**

Girls and gender-diverse children continue to face systemic barriers.



## Key Priorities

- Implement national plans to eliminate GBV and child marriage.
- Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health education and services.
- Provide budgets for menstrual health and gender-sensitive sanitation.
- Guarantee equal representation in STEM, leadership, and civic participation.
- Strengthen collaboration with Women20 and gender-focused partners.
- Support families to challenge harmful norms and model equality.

### 1.10 Global Health and Wellbeing

The pandemic revealed structural weaknesses in health systems, with children disproportionately affected.

#### Key Priorities

- Strengthen PHC systems and local medicine/vaccine production.
- Ensure universal access to WASH in schools, homes, and communities.
- Invest in community health workers and mid-level providers.
- Support regional research hubs in the Global South.
- Empower families and caregivers to support preventive health and advocacy.

### 1.11 Human Rights, Democracy and Civic Space

Civic space is shrinking globally, with children among the most affected.

#### Key Priorities

- Recognise children's rights to association and peaceful assembly.
- Establish mechanisms for child representation in peacebuilding, migration, and justice forums.
- Integrate UNCRC and ACRWC standards into G20 peer-review processes.
- Strengthen collaboration with Civil20 and Youth20.
- Equip families and caregivers to support civic engagement and democratic participation.

A society that listens to its youngest members renews its social contract and strengthens its democratic future.

### Mapping Children20 Themes to G20 Working Groups

- **Digital Sovereignty:** Digital Economy WG
- **Climate Justice:** Climate Sustainability WG; Energy Transitions WG



- **SDG Acceleration:** Development WG
- **Trade and Value Chains:** Trade and Investment WG
- **Health:** Health WG
- **Education:** EdWG (where convened)
- **Gender and Inclusion:** Women20; Labour and Employment WG
- **Finance and Infrastructure:** Finance Track; Debt Working Groups

## **2. CROSS-CUTTING PRINCIPLES: PARTICIPATION, SAFEGUARDING AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

The effectiveness of all Children20 recommendations depends on three interconnected principles: participation, safeguarding, and accountability. Together, they form the ethical and operational foundation for child engagement across G20 processes.

### **Participation**

Children have the right to participate in decisions that affect their lives, as articulated in:

- Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)
- Article 4 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC)

Meaningful participation requires processes that are:

- **Safe:** supported by clear protection measures
- **Inclusive:** reflecting diversity of age, gender, disability, language, location, and migration status
- **Structured:** with predictable pathways such as advisory councils, consultations, and thematic dialogues
- **Influential:** supported by transparent feedback loops showing how contributions shape outcomes

Quality participation strengthens intergenerational trust, improves policy design, and ensures global decisions reflect the realities of those most affected.

### **Safeguarding**

Safeguarding protects children's physical, psychological, and digital wellbeing throughout their engagement in G20 processes. Effective safeguarding requires:

- trained facilitators and vetted adults
- accessible grievance and reporting mechanisms
- trauma-informed approaches
- disability-inclusive planning and support



- ethical data and privacy practices
- clear consent procedures and child-friendly communication

Strong safeguarding ensures that participation is empowering rather than extractive and upholds G20 standards of ethical engagement.

### **Accountability**

Accountability ensures that child participation results in meaningful impact rather than symbolic engagement. It includes:

- transparent reporting on how children's contributions influence G20 decisions
- public commitments to child-sensitive indicators and targets
- regular monitoring, review, and independent evaluation
- accessible feedback to children and their communities

Accountability strengthens implementation, enhances legitimacy, and sustains confidence in participatory governance.

### **Monitoring and Accountability Framework**

To align with global indicators, the Children20 proposes a monitoring approach anchored in SDG, UNCRC, and WHO frameworks. Priority metrics include:

- access to safe digital connectivity
- child climate-vulnerability indicators
- coverage of child and adolescent mental-health services
- early-childhood development and school-readiness indicators
- gender-based violence prevalence and reporting pathways

This framework supports evidence-based G20 commitments while respecting national contexts.

## **3. INSTITUTIONALISING THE CHILDREN20 WITHIN THE G20 PROCESS**

Embedding children's participation within G20 processes requires a phased and context-sensitive approach. The Children20 proposes an institutional architecture that supports continuity, flexibility, and long-term sustainability, while respecting the political and institutional diversity of G20 Members.

### **A Phased Approach**



### **Brazil 2024 – Proof of Concept**

Demonstrated the value and political feasibility of structured child participation within the G20 ecosystem.

### **South Africa 2025 – Institutionalisation**

Developed governance proposals, participation standards, and safeguarding guidelines; integrated child participation into the Social Summit process.

### **United States 2026 – Consolidation**

Provides an opportunity to strengthen visibility, refine mechanisms, and embed the Children20 within broader engagement-group collaboration.

This phased model offers a realistic pathway towards long-term integration of children's perspectives in G20 deliberations.

## **Institutional Architecture**

### **Formal Recognition**

The Children20 encourages the G20 to explore options for gradually formalising child participation within the Social Summit track, in alignment with existing G20 processes and national contexts.

### **Co-Leadership Model**

- child and adult co-chairs
- regional representation
- shared Sherpa coordination
- technical expertise across key thematic areas

This model, piloted during the Children20 Pre-Summit, has demonstrated strong potential for intergenerational collaboration.

### **Secretariat and Regional Nodes**

A Global Children20 Secretariat, hosted in Africa with regional support mechanisms, would strengthen coordination, capacity development, and continuous engagement beyond the annual G20 cycle.

This can be implemented through collaboration with Children's Parliaments and existing participation structures.

### **Safeguarding and Participation Committees**



Standing committees can oversee safeguarding, training, grievance mechanisms, and standard-setting, ensuring consistency across Presidencies.

### **Annual Reporting**

A G20 Children's Progress Report could summarise child-centred indicators, track commitments, and highlight progress.

This report can be incorporated into existing G20 reporting streams to avoid additional bureaucratic burdens.

### **Institutionalisation Pathway Options**

To accommodate diverse political contexts, the Children20 proposes three pathways:

#### **Option A: Light-Touch (Short Term)**

- Presidency-led annual consultation with children
- Inclusion of child inputs in Presidency documents

#### **Option B: Intermediate (Medium Term)**

- Informal working group on child participation
- Rotating coordination between Presidencies

#### **Option C: Full Engagement Group (Long Term)**

- Formal recognition of a Children20 Engagement Group
- Dedicated secretariat and structured global participation

This tiered model supports flexibility and consensus-building across G20 Members.

## **4. ABBREVIATED POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

To support Sherpas, Ministers, and engagement groups, the Children20 highlights six priority actions:

- Strengthen structured child participation within the Social Summit track.
- Encourage Child-Rights Impact Assessments across relevant G20 policy areas.
- Increase targeted development finance for child-centred initiatives, including education, health, nutrition, climate resilience, and digital safety.
- Advance a G20 Digital and Climate Compact for Children, aligning digital governance and climate action with children's wellbeing.
- Integrate participation standards and safeguarding guidelines into Social Summit processes.





- Maintain continuity across Brazil, South Africa, and the United States to support long-term development of the Children20 architecture.

These recommendations prioritise political feasibility, alignment, and political realism across G20 Members.

## **5. FINANCING FRAMEWORK FOR PROPOSED ACTIONS**

Embedding child-sensitive approaches into G20 processes requires sustainable, well-coordinated financing. The Children20 proposes a diversified financing model that leverages existing mechanisms.

### **Cost-Neutral Approaches**

- integrate consultations and dialogues within existing Presidency logistics
- reuse established digital platforms and consultation tools

### **MDB-Aligned Financing**

- engage multilateral development banks to support child-focused social protection and resilience programmes
- utilise climate-adaptation financing for child-sensitive interventions

### **Philanthropic Partnerships**

- leverage philanthropy to support digital safety, early childhood development, climate justice, and gender equality initiatives

### **Blended Finance**

- develop a Global Children's Resilience Fund pooling contributions from governments, MDBs, and private actors
- prioritise investment in education, health systems, and digital inclusion

This framework recognises fiscal pressures across countries and provides scalable, realistic pathways for action.

## **6. LINKING CHILDREN'S VOICES TO G20 POLICY PROCESSES**

The Children20 Declaration and the creative outputs from the Children20 Zone provide powerful insights into children's priorities and lived realities. To ensure policy relevance, these insights are mapped directly to G20 themes and translated into





actionable recommendations through the prioritised agenda and thematic areas outlined above.

This approach strengthens legitimacy, protects fidelity to children's contributions, and ensures coherence between narrative and policy.

## **PUBLIC CHILDREN20 DOCUMENT**

### **Our Future, Our Voice: Change Begins When We Are Heard**

#### **1. Introduction**

The Children20 is not only a policy process. It is a platform for dialogue, learning, and intergenerational collaboration. Under the South African G20 Presidency, this vision became tangible through two connected experiences:

- the Children20 Pre-Summit (3–4 October 2025)
- the Children20 Zone at the G20 Social Summit (18–20 November 2025)

Together, these spaces demonstrated how structured engagement can bring children, policymakers, civil-society organisations, and development partners into meaningful exchange. They also illustrated how creativity and policy can reinforce one another when children are supported to participate safely and confidently.

#### **2. The Children20 Pre-Summit: A Platform for Intergenerational Governance**

The Pre-Summit brought together 50 children and 100 adults from across Africa, representing diverse identities and experiences, including:

- children with disabilities
- migrant backgrounds
- rural and urban communities
- grassroots child-led groups
- children's parliaments and youth forums

Adults included government officials, technical specialists, safeguarding teams, and child-rights organisations.

#### **Purpose and Approach**

The Pre-Summit was designed to:



1. Pilot the Children20 governance model with child and adult co-chairs for each thematic group.
2. Co-create the Children20 Declaration, synthesising children's priorities across digital safety, climate justice, mental health, poverty, and dignity.
3. Strengthen intergenerational leadership grounded in mutual respect and shared responsibility.
4. Build children's capacity to understand the G20 structure, financing systems, and pathways for policy influence.
5. Explore sustainable funding models for child-centred development.

The structure aligned with the proposed long-term Children20 architecture, including Sherpa coordination, participation committees, and safeguarding oversight.

## **Outcomes**

The Pre-Summit produced three key outcomes:

- a child-authored Children20 Declaration
- a governance proposal advancing institutionalisation of a Children20 track
- a model of intergenerational co-leadership adopted by several regional child forums

Throughout the process, children moderated discussions, reviewed drafts, and led thematic dialogues. Adults contributed expertise and ensured safe, equitable participation.

## **3. The Children20 Zone at the G20 Social Summit: A Living Manifesto**

Hosted at the G20 Social Summit, the Children20 Zone served as a public-facing engagement space, enabling delegates to experience children's perspectives directly through creativity, dialogue, and innovation.

Its design centred on a clear message:

“Change Begins When We Are Heard.”

## **Purpose**

The Zone aimed to:

- bridge policy and lived experience
- demonstrate the relevance of children's priorities to G20 themes



- offer interactive and accessible engagement for delegates
- amplify children's voices through creative mediums
- model inclusive participation within a global forum

## Key Activations

### A. Voice of Tomorrow

A spoken-word stage where children and young people reflected on their futures, beginning each contribution with:

*"In my future, I see..."*

This created a collective narrative of safety, dignity, opportunity, and justice.

### B. Future Lab: Made by Teens

A youth-led innovation hub showcasing ideas linked to:

- digital inclusion
- climate solutions
- trade justice
- sustainable finance

It demonstrated young people's capacity for practical, solution-oriented innovation.

### C. Becoming

A reflective installation where adults and children shared affirmations on a mirror wall, expressing who they are and who they aspire to become. This created a shared space of introspection and connection.

### D. Pulse of the Youth

An Amapiano-themed activation where delegates recorded messages alongside young musicians, engaging creatively with themes of unity and collective action.

### E. Reimagine Africa

A Dream Tree installation made from recycled materials and illuminated by solar lanterns, displaying written commitments to sustainability and justice.

Partner exhibitions by #Keready, Grow Great, SmartStart, Brave Movement, Side-by-Side, and Show Me Your Number reflected themes including early learning, nutrition, gender safety, parental connection, and youth leadership.

## Impact

- Hundreds of delegates engaged directly with children.
- Media coverage positioned South Africa's Presidency as a leader in participatory innovation.
- International partners recognised the Zone as an effective model for embedding



public participation in global summits.

- The space demonstrated how creativity can support policy processes and humanise complex issues.

#### **4. Reflections and Lessons Learned**

The Children20 processes generated several insights relevant for future G20 cycles:

- Design with children from the outset to ensure relevance, ownership, and alignment.
- Strong safeguarding is essential to trust and sustainability.
- Intergenerational collaboration deepens understanding and builds confidence.
- Creative mediums enrich engagement and make policy more accessible.
- Diverse representation strengthens outcomes and improves recommendations.

These lessons can guide future Social Summits and engagement groups seeking to embed meaningful participation.

#### **5. Sustaining Momentum Beyond 2025: The Bridge to the US Presidency**

South Africa's Presidency represents the institutionalisation phase of the Children20. The United States Presidency in 2026 offers an opportunity to consolidate progress, expand participation, and strengthen collaboration across engagement groups. South Africa's G20 leadership legacy should be anchored in a sustained commitment to investing in the rights and wellbeing of mothers, children, and adolescents as a cornerstone of human capital development, resilience, and sustainable growth - recognizing that these investments form the foundation of an inclusive and prosperous future for all.

##### **Continuity Across Presidencies**

###### **Brazil 2024 – Proof of Concept**

Introduced structured child participation and demonstrated political feasibility.

###### **South Africa 2025 – Institutionalisation**

Developed governance models, safeguarding frameworks, and integrated child participation into the Social Summit track.

###### **United States 2026 – Consolidation**

Opportunity to deepen structures, enhance visibility, and advance long-term recognition of the Children20 within G20 engagement architecture.

##### **Priorities for the Bridge Year**



- Establish a Global Children20 Secretariat with regional coordination mechanisms.
- Launch an Annual G20 Children's Progress Report aligned with existing monitoring frameworks.
- Strengthen collaboration with Civil20, Youth20, Women20, and Ocean20.
- Institutionalise the Children20 Zone as a recurring Social Summit feature.
- Develop a cross-presidency mentorship programme linking child delegates across Brazil, South Africa, and the United States.

## **6. Conclusion**

The Children20 affirms a simple principle: global progress is reflected in the dignity, safety, and opportunity afforded to the next generation.

Brazil showed that structured child participation is possible.

South Africa demonstrates that it is practical and scalable.

The United States can ensure it becomes permanent.

By embedding child participation within the G20 Social Summit and aligning policy processes with children's lived realities, the G20 can model governance that is inclusive, forward-looking, and grounded in shared responsibility.

When children are heard, policy gains purpose.

When children lead, the future becomes possible.

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