

High Level Sherpa Summary

1. Purpose and political framing

This submission sets out the Children20 contribution to the G20 Development Agenda under South Africa's Presidency in 2025, in continuity with Brazil's Children in G20 Initiative and with a view to a bridge year into the United States Presidency in 2026.

Its core proposition is simple and strategic: if the G20 is serious about stability, growth and legitimacy in a time of polycrisis, then investing in the rights and wellbeing of children, adolescents and their caregivers, particularly women, must become a structural feature of its agenda, not an add on. Children are one third of the global population, more than half live in G20 countries, and they feel the consequences of G20 decisions earliest and longest.

The document provides:

- An 11 theme policy framework that integrates South Africa's Social Summit themes with Brazil's six pillars.
- A set of cross cutting principles on participation, safeguarding and accountability.
- A realistic institutionalisation pathway for a permanent Children20 within the G20 ecosystem.
- A light, politically feasible menu of priority actions and financing options that Sherpas can advance without reopening every negotiation.

2. Why children, why now

The current phase of the G20 is defined by overlapping crises: inflation and debt, climate breakdown, digital disruption, conflict, shrinking civic space and deep structural inequality. Children, especially girls, gender diverse young people, those in rural and informal settlements, and children with disabilities, sit at the sharpest edge of these trends.

Key messages for Sherpas:

- Economic stability without child centred social justice is an illusion. Child sensitive approaches strengthen human capital, productivity, resilience and social cohesion.
- Brazil's 2024 Children in G20 Initiative has already proved that child participation in the G20 is feasible and adds value. South Africa's Presidency moves from proof of concept to institutional design. The United States can consolidate and normalise this.



- South Africa's leadership legacy should be defined by a sustained commitment to investing in the rights and wellbeing of mothers, children and adolescents as a cornerstone of human capital development and inclusive growth.

3. Strategic objectives of the Children20 track

The Children20 advances five linked objectives that Sherpas can readily align with existing workstreams:

1. Strengthen structured, safe child participation within G20 processes, particularly the Social Summit.
2. Ensure the Children20 Declaration and child led processes inform G20 negotiations and communiqués in a traceable way.
3. Promote intergenerational collaboration across all thematic areas, with clear roles for children, youth and adults.
4. Build capacity for children to participate confidently and safely, with robust safeguarding and trauma informed support.
5. Mobilise sustainable financing for child centred development through better use of national budgets, multilateral systems and partnerships, rather than stand alone projects.

The approach is explicitly intersectional and feminist. It recognises the care economy, unpaid work, gender based violence, sexual and reproductive health, and the structural barriers faced by girls and gender diverse children as central to any credible development agenda.

4. Prioritised agenda for Sherpa level engagement

To support realistic negotiation, the Children20 proposes a tiered approach.

Tier 1: High feasibility and strong G20 alignment

- Digital governance and AI safety for children, including child impact due diligence for platforms and AI systems.
- Child sensitive climate adaptation and resilience in NDCs, adaptation plans and climate finance.
- SDG acceleration using child disaggregated data and child focused indicators.
- Integration of child and adolescent mental health into primary health care and health systems.

- 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, these investments form the foundation of an inclusive and prosperous future.

Tier 2: Medium feasibility

- Gender equality and protection, including GBV prevention, menstrual health and SRHR for adolescents.
- Education quality and accessibility, including early childhood development and climate resilient, safe schools.
- Human rights and civic participation, including children's right to organise and be heard in democratic processes.

Tier 3: Long term ambition

- Institutionalisation of a Children20 engagement group in the G20 architecture.
- Establishment of a Global Children's Resilience Fund using blended finance.
- Child sensitive due diligence in trade and value chains that tackles exploitative labour and environmental harm.

Sherpas can use this ladder to identify immediate entry points, while keeping sight of the long term architecture.

5. Eleven thematic priorities at a glance

The full document sets out eleven substantive themes, each with concrete proposals. For briefing purposes:

- 1. Digital sovereignty, AI and inclusive innovation**
Child impact due diligence for tech companies, age appropriate design, strong privacy and data protection, affordable access, digital literacy curricula co developed with children, a G20 Observatory on Children in the Digital Environment, and properly resourced helplines.
- 2. Financing the future: sustainable investment and infrastructure**
Child impact assessments across budget cycles and infrastructure; universal child benefits as a minimum social protection floor; debt reforms that protect fiscal space for health, education and protection; a Global Children's Resilience Fund; and meaningful child participation in budget processes.
- 3. Climate resilience and just energy transition**
Children's rights embedded in NDCs and adaptation plans; child centred adaptation finance; green skills and climate education; respect for indigenous knowledge;

disaster preparedness that includes children with disabilities; and pathways for child participation in climate decisions.

4. Advancing the SDGs

Stronger child specific indicators; National SDG Forums with structured child participation; a G20 Generation 2030 Compact that measures progress through outcomes for children; and alignment with Agenda 2063 and regional child rights instruments.

5. Trade, resilience and inclusive value chains

Binding social safeguards to eliminate exploitative child labour and unsafe informal work; support for families and small producers in trade transitions; ethical, circular and fair wage value chains; and better consumer protection for children in digital and e commerce markets.

6. Mental health and wellbeing

Integration of mental health into primary health care and schools; minimum budget targets for mental health; scaling community based support, helplines and digital tools; and capacity building for families, teachers and frontline workers.

7. Poverty and food security

Expanded school feeding and nutrition grants; income support above food poverty lines; integration of mental health and protection into poverty strategies; and child led monitoring of school meals and community gardens.

8. Quality education

ECD as a universal right; inclusive, anti racist, gender responsive curricula; safe, climate resilient school infrastructure; nature based education; and public financing at UNESCO recommended levels.

9. Gender equality and inclusion

National plans to end GBV and child marriage; universal SRHR education and services; budgets for menstrual health and sanitation; equal participation of girls and gender diverse children in STEM and leadership; and joint work with Women20.

10. Global health and wellbeing

Stronger primary health care systems; local and regional medicine and vaccine production; universal WASH access; investment in community health workers; and Global South research hubs.

11. Human rights, democracy and civic space

Protection of children's rights to association and peaceful assembly; structured roles in peacebuilding and migration processes; integration of UNCRC and ACRWC standards into G20 peer review; and collaboration with Civil20 and Youth20.

The themes map directly to existing working groups in Finance, Development, Health, Digital Economy, Climate and Energy, Trade and Investment, Education and Women20, which reduces transaction costs for Sherpas.

6. Cross cutting principles: participation, safeguarding, accountability

The Children20 is explicit that child participation must be ethical, not extractive.

- **Participation** is grounded in UNCRC and ACRWC standards and must be safe, inclusive, structured and influential. That means diverse representation, clear feedback loops and predictable spaces where children's inputs are visibly used.
- **Safeguarding** covers physical, psychological and digital safety, with trained facilitators, grievance mechanisms, disability inclusion, ethical data practices and informed consent.
- **Accountability** requires transparent reporting on how children's contributions shape outcomes, child sensitive indicators and regular monitoring and evaluation.

For Sherpas, this translates into a simple test: if children are present in a process, can we show them what changed as a result of their contribution, and were they safe throughout.

7. Institutionalising the Children20

The document proposes a phased, politically sensitive pathway.

- **Brazil 2024: Proof of concept**
Demonstrated feasibility and value of structured child participation.
- **South Africa 2025: Institutional design**
Developed governance proposals, co leadership models, safeguarding standards and the Children20 Zone as a Social Summit feature.
- **United States 2026: Consolidation**
Opportunity to entrench the Children20 as a recognised component of the G20 engagement ecosystem, and to deepen collaboration with other engagement groups.

Key elements include:

- A co leadership model with child and adult co chairs, regional representation and shared Sherpa coordination.
- A Global Children20 Secretariat hosted in Africa with regional nodes, working through existing parliaments and participation structures.
- Standing safeguarding and participation committees.
- An annual G20 Children's Progress Report feeding into existing reporting streams.

Three institutionalisation options are put on the table to accommodate different political appetites:

- Option A: Light touch annual Presidency led consultation with children and inclusion of inputs in documents.

- Option B: Intermediate informal working group on child participation rotating across Presidencies.
- Option C: Full engagement group status with a dedicated secretariat and structured global participation.

8. Financing and implementation

Recognising fiscal constraints and political sensitivities, the Children20 proposes a pragmatic financing approach:

- **Cost neutral measures** by integrating consultations into existing Presidency logistics and using established digital tools.
- **MDB aligned financing** for child focused social protection and resilience, including use of climate adaptation windows.
- **Philanthropic partnerships** for digital safety, ECD, climate justice and gender equality, with transparency and alignment to public priorities.
- **Blended finance** through a proposed Global Children's Resilience Fund focused on education, health systems and digital inclusion.

The emphasis is on reorienting existing flows and frameworks rather than creating new, burdensome instruments.

9. Linkage to lived experience and Brazil's policy pack

The Children20 Declaration and the Children20 Zone at the Social Summit function as a public, child facing counterpart to the formal policy pack. They have:

- Produced a child authored declaration that aligns with and enriches the eleven themes.
- Demonstrated high quality intergenerational governance in practice.
- Created a visible platform for children's voices in the G20 space that media and international partners have recognised as a model.

Children affirm key priorities already present in the Brazil policy pack: counsellors and safe places to talk, no child going hungry, safe and funded schools, gender equality, clean water and health care, and real participation in decisions. The South African Presidency has chosen to extend, not duplicate, this work.



10. Immediate asks of Sherpas

For practical purposes, Sherpas are invited to:

1. Recognise the Children20 contribution as an input to the Social Summit and relevant working groups, with explicit references where feasible in outcome documents.
2. Champion child rights language and child sensitive indicators within communiqués on digital, climate, health, finance and trade.
3. Support at least a light touch or intermediate institutionalisation option in G20 discussions on engagement architecture, with a view to testing and refining under the United States Presidency.
4. Encourage line ministries and working groups to engage with the thematic recommendations most relevant to their mandates.
5. Signal, in Presidency summaries and public messaging, that investing in the rights and wellbeing of mothers, children and adolescents is understood as a core pillar of South Africa's G20 legacy.

Put bluntly: the Children20 is offering the G20 a ready made, politically aware framework to centre children in the development agenda without derailing existing workstreams. The choice now is whether the G20 treats children as photo opportunities, or as structural partners in shaping a fairer, more sustainable global order.