



W20 South Africa Inception meeting
Women in Solidarity
*Rapporteur
Report*

Date: 21-22 May 2026
Location: Lagoon Beach Hotel, Cape Town, South Africa

Prepared for: W20 Co-Chairs by UN Women

Reporting Period: Complete proceedings covering Opening Plenary, Second Plenary, and thematic panel sessions

The Women 20 (W20) South Africa Inception Meeting convened under the Republic of South Africa's historic G20 Presidency, represents the first occasion an African nation has assumed this critical leadership role within the global economic governance framework. The two-day proceedings brought together delegates from fifteen G20 and six other African countries (Angola, Botswana, Ghana, Kenya, Uganda and Zimbabwe) as well as Consul Generals from Angola, Brazil, France, Russia and Türkiye, encompassing representatives from government institutions, civil society organisations, private sector entities, academic institutions, and multilateral organisations with 196 in-person attendees, including 52 international guests, and virtual participation ranging from 269 and 86 over the two days from across the globe.

The meeting operated under the comprehensive theme “**Women in Solidarity for Sustainable Socioeconomic Development**,” establishing a framework for transformative policy development across seven strategic priority areas:

- i. Financial Inclusion and Entrepreneurship.
- ii. The Care Economy.
- iii. Climate Justice and the Environment.
- iv. Gender-Based Violence and Femicide.
- v. Health Equity for Women and Girls.
- vi. Women, Land and Agriculture.
- vii. Education, STEM, and the digital divide.

The proceedings demonstrated unprecedented integration of global policy frameworks with community-level implementation strategies, positioning the W20 as an implementation accelerator rather than solely an advocacy platform.

The meeting addressed urgent contemporary challenges including the global rollback of women's rights, legal inequality affecting 2.9 billion women worldwide, climate justice imperatives, and the imperative for systemic transformation of economic structures to ensure sustainable and equitable development outcomes. The plenaries and panel inputs over the two days addressed financial inclusion and entrepreneurship, care economy transformation, climate justice and environmental concerns, gender-based violence prevention, health equity, rural women, climate resilience and digital transformation, and education including STEM and digital access. The final session of day 2 dealt with community outreach initiatives in the Western Cape province with inputs from CSOs and the young women benefiting from training and other community interventions.



W20 South Africa co-chairs Dr Sindiswa Mzamo and Prof Narnia Bohler-Muller with Her Excellency Sindisiwe Chikunga Minister of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities in the Presidency (center).

GLOBAL CONTEXT AND STRATEGIC IMPERATIVES



L-R: Amb Mathu Joyini South Africa's permanent representative to the UN, Ms Gulden Turktan founding member of W20 Turkiye, Ms Anne Simmons-Benton and Ms Virginia Littlejohn co-chairs USA and Ms Irene Natividad Global Summit of Women.

Contemporary Challenges to Gender Equality

The proceedings identified critical threats to gender equality progress, including the resurgence of right-wing political movements resulting in the systematic dismantling of reproductive rights, affirmative action mechanisms, and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programming across multiple jurisdictions. The emergence of natalism movements seeking to confine women to traditional reproductive roles was identified as a particular concern requiring coordinated multilateral response.

Legal Inequality Framework Analysis

Comprehensive analysis presented by the World Bank's Women, Business and the Law initiative revealed systematic legal inequality affecting women globally. Key findings include:

- Women possess only two-thirds of the legal rights afforded to men across 190 countries surveyed.
- 2.9 billion women face legal barriers to economic participation.
- No country has achieved full legal equality for women.
- Current reform trajectories suggest full legal equality will require 300 years at present pace.
- Only 40% of necessary policy implementation tools are currently operational.

African Development Integration Imperatives

African-specific analysis demonstrated that gender equality considerations remain isolated within gender-focused ministries rather than being integrated across comprehensive economic policymaking frameworks. Financial inclusion was identified as the lowest-performing area for women's participation, with current progress trajectories indicating full inclusion will not be achieved until 2093 without accelerated intervention.



Five-Pillar Implementation Framework



L-R Ms Aleta Miller UN Women, Prof Narnia Bohler-Muller head of delegation and co-chair W20 South Africa and Her Excellency Sindisiwe Chikunga Minister of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities in the Presidency.

Minister Sindisiwe Chikunga articulated a comprehensive action framework encompassing:

- i. Gender-responsive budgeting implementation and leadership quota establishment.
- ii. Inclusive fiscal reform addressing structural economic inequalities.
- iii. Equal access to land ownership and asset control.
- iv. Systematic removal of gendered trade barriers.
- v. Universal access to financial services and credit mechanisms.

INNOVATIVE FINANCING AND INVESTMENT FRAMEWORKS

African Women-Led Investment Models

WIPHOLD's thirty-year operational history provided a demonstrable model for women-led investment transformation. Founded by four Black women with initial capital of R1 billion, the organisation has achieved:

- First Black women-owned company listing on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (1999).
- Strategic delisting to maintain women's control and mission integrity.
- Investment focus on sectors directly affecting women's daily experiences: agriculture, finance, infrastructure, and education.
- Total procurement of R1.2 billion from small, medium, and micro-enterprises
- 8.4% increase in procurement from women-owned businesses (R1.3 billion).





Plenary speakers 22 May 2025: L-R Ms Irene Natividad, Dr Theophiline Bose-Duker African Centre for Economic Transformation; Ms Daniela Behr Women, Business and the Law World Bank Group, DDG Shoki Tshabalala DWYPD. Dr Okito Wedi Creative Development. Ms Ms Nontobeko Ndlazi, Group Chief Financial Officer WIPHOLD and Prof Bonang Mohale Chancellor of the University of Free State

Shoprite’s commitment to empowering entrepreneurs, particularly small, medium, and micro-enterprises (SMMEs), by embedding them into their supply chain ecosystem was highlighted. Shoprite’s role as one of Africa’s largest retailers has a core purpose to uplift lives by creating economic opportunities and providing affordable goods through their intentional support for women-owned businesses, noting an 8.4% increase in procurement from these enterprises, amounting to approximately 1.3 billion rand. The company also invests in community development through initiatives like training on sustainable farming, supporting community food gardens, and subsidising affordable meals, such as the widely popular “five rand meals” sold weekly.

Care Economy Investment Initiative

Creative Development’s partnership with W20 targeting \$1 billion mobilisation represents systematic recognition of care economy sectors as viable investment opportunities rather than charitable activities. The initiative encompasses African women’s leadership development, entrepreneurship support, and transformation of care provision from unpaid labour to recognised economic infrastructure.

THE CENTRALITY OF THE CARE ECONOMY

Livelihood opportunities within the care economy: Systems and policy frameworks are necessary to ensure dignified work for care workers who comprise mostly of women in education, healthcare, domestic and elder care. Service gaps left by the state provide opportunities but many women enter entrepreneurship out of survival, not strategy, due to the lack of accessible childcare and elder support.

Informality remains high due to low wages and unaffordable contributions to social systems. Indonesia’s national care roadmap is a model to consider, with its comprehensive approach to childcare, eldercare, disability support, and gender-responsive policies like paternity leave.

Counting unpaid care work by including GDP calculations can positively impact the overall economy. Studies have shown that unpaid care work can contribute a significant percentage of GDP, ranging from 5,5% to 41,3 in different countries



A shift in social norms is necessary to truly value care work and ensure decent conditions for care workers.



Intersections between entrepreneurship, financial inclusion and the care economy Panel 1

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND STEM PARTICIPATION

Systematic Barriers Analysis

Gender-based violence was identified as a systematic “technology of restriction” limiting women’s academic and scientific participation through sexual harassment, institutional coercion, coordinated abuse networks, professional retaliation against survivors, and targeted digital platform harassment.

Economic Impact Assessment

Quantified economic losses include \$28 trillion globally due to constrained women’s economic engagement. Research demonstrates companies with increased women’s engineering participation achieve 15% higher profitability and 35% increased innovation capacity. Technology-facilitated gender-based violence has increased by 900%, creating additional barriers to women’s STEM sector participation.

Policy Response Framework

Evidence-based interventions require trauma-informed STEM policies with survivor leadership, institutional transformation addressing embedded cultural practices, women’s technology leadership ensuring participation in design and ownership rather than consumption, comprehensive digital safety frameworks, and binding STEM equity policies incorporating gender audits and equity-linked funding mechanisms.



Gender-based violence s a critical barrier to women’s progress in academia and STEM Panel 2



CLIMATE JUSTICE AND ENERGY TRANSITION INTEGRATION

Just Transition Principles

The proceedings established comprehensive frameworks for gender-responsive energy transition based on three foundational justice principles:

- **Restorative Justice:** Addressing historical exclusions and correcting past inequities in energy access and sectoral participation.
- **Redistributive Justice:** Ensuring equitable distribution of transition risks and benefits across geographic regions and demographic groups.
- **Procedural Justice:** Guaranteeing inclusive decision-making processes through comprehensive stakeholder consultation and participation mechanisms.

Gender-Responsive Energy Policy Development



The promises of challenges of a just transition to renewable energy for women's economic empowerment Panel 3

Systematic barriers identified include limited access to capital, STEM education deficits, leadership underrepresentation, and restricted professional networks. Policy responses encompass clean cooking technology investment positioning women as designers and manufacturers rather than passive recipients, renewable energy employment initiatives addressing gender disparities in technical and leadership positions, and implementation of gender quotas with mentorship and capacity-building support.

RURAL CLIMATE RESILIENCE AND WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

Rural women were recognised as critical but underutilised climate adaptation agents through evidence-based case studies:

Economic Autonomy Development: Integration of agriculture, livestock, forestry, and beekeeping initiatives with market access facilitation and technology adoption.



Organisational Capacity Building: Establishment of women-led cooperatives and networks, with the Argentina case study demonstrating engagement of over 5,000 women in structured collective action.

Digital Transformation: Indigenous women-led internet companies (46 established in the case study region) improving connectivity infrastructure in low-density rural areas.

Carbon Market Participation: Community governance mechanisms ensuring long-term benefit distribution from post-COP29 carbon trading opportunities.



The untapped potential of rural women: Climate resilience, food security and digital transformation Panel with inputs from Microsoft and Google South Africa Panel 4.

TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION AND DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Digital Divide Analysis and Response

Comprehensive analysis revealed 886 million women globally remain unconnected to digital infrastructure, with rural women experiencing the most severe exclusion. Women demonstrate 14% lower probability of mobile internet access compared to men, with rural disparities significantly exceeding urban gaps. Handset affordability was identified as the primary barrier rather than digital literacy deficits.

Successful Digital Inclusion Models

- **Indonesia's Sisternet Program:** Free digital literacy initiative reaching 890,000 women with target expansion to 2.5 million by 2025, achieving measurable outcomes including 13% average profit growth, 75% digitalisation uptake, and 30% product quality improvement among women-led micro, small, and medium enterprises.
- **Turkey's CO-PRO Initiative:** National project active across 16 cooperatives in 13 cities, providing comprehensive capacity building in digital marketing, e-commerce, cooperative governance, infrastructure upgrades, and climate adaptation practices, having trained over 260 women entering digital economy participation.
- **Corporate Engagement Initiatives:** Microsoft South Africa's R1.3 billion investment in rural small and medium enterprises achieving 80% employment rates through youth digital skills programming and AI training for one million youth across South Africa and Nigeria. Google South Africa's artificial intelligence applications addressing food security through desert locust prediction, weather forecasting for Global South contexts, and maternal health through affordable ultrasound access in remote areas.
- **Artificial Intelligence and Technology Creation:** Recognition that African women must transition from technology consumption to technology creation and content development roles to ensure authentic representation in global digital narratives and prevent algorithmic bias perpetuation.



HEALTH EQUITY AND GENDERED MEDICINE

Medical Research Bias Analysis

Traditional medical research, diagnostics, and treatment protocols have historically utilised white, male subjects as standard references, resulting in systematic underservice of women and diverse demographic groups. Gender medicine approaches require inclusive frameworks considering poverty, ethnicity, and social role factors in health system design.



Ms Elvira Marasco (Italy) and Ms Zaynab Essack (SA), co-chairs of the Health Equity Task Team

Cross-Sector Integration Requirements

Health equity advancement necessitates training integration across healthcare provision, urban planning, policy development, and system design to incorporate gender-responsive perspectives ensuring equitable treatment protocols and sex-disaggregated data analysis in medical research and clinical practice.

GRASSROOTS IMPLEMENTATION AND COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

Pan-African Coordination Mechanisms

The Pan-African Women's Organisation (PAWO) emphasised continental leadership priorities including digital inclusion requiring African women's technology creation rather than consumption, coordinated resistance to right-wing populism and nationalism threatening human rights and gender equality, and continental consultation processes culminating in August/September with unified African women's agenda development for W20 and global forum participation.

Global South Initiatives

Sapiens Research and Analysis (India) announced the following initiatives in support of W20:

- Establishing a Knowledge Lab focused on feminist AI, SHG-led economies, and gender budgeting.
- Launching the We-Lead World Portal to share tools, stories, and best practices with grassroots women
- Rolling out a Grassroots Diplomacy Fellowship, starting with South-South Collaboration in six countries, aiming to train 100 women as civic diplomats and governance innovators.



Ms Bathabile Dlamini Deputy President of Pan-African Women's Association (PAWO) an affiliate to the African Union



Community-Based Programme Models



Outreach Part 1: Community-based organisations working with young women in the Western Cape province



Outreach Part 2: Young women from the Western Cape province



Evidence-based youth and women's empowerment approaches demonstrated through:

Holistic Youth Development: Basic Package of Support providing personalised coaching addressing interconnected challenges beyond unemployment through community practice building and social fabric restoration. YearBeyond programming connecting 4,000 annually excluded young people to economic opportunities through community service, capacity building, and structured mentorship.

Trauma-Informed Education: MathMom initiative utilising intergenerational models with retired teachers mentoring unemployed women as community mathematics tutors, recognising deep impacts of poverty, unemployment, violence, and gender-based abuse while supporting children's education and adult healing processes.

Economic Innovation Recognition: Urban agriculture initiatives providing dignity and mental health benefits through community garden development, women-led innovation in male-dominated delivery services, and informal economy entrepreneurship requiring platform access and funding support.

Ukhukelo Lolutsha shared the organisation's work supporting children and youth through a comprehensive after-school programme that includes literacy, digital skills, and life-skills development.

Leadership Pipeline Development: Real-time mentorship demonstrations between senior business leaders and grassroots entrepreneurs established practical support networks and guidance systems for scaling community-led initiatives to national and international implementation levels.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR W20 STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENT

Immediate Priority Actions

Rights Protection and Rollback Response: Develop coordinated resistance strategies addressing global rollback of women's rights and diversity, equity, inclusion programming through multilateral partnership strengthening and evidence-based advocacy.

W20 Process Integration: Strengthen collaboration with W20 task team processes to amplify women's voices in G20 policy development, support evidence-based advocacy through research institution partnerships, and enhance coordination between Commission on the Status of Women, Beijing+30 processes, and W20 frameworks.

Legacy Initiative Implementation: Support Transformative Emerging Industrial Accelerator and Disability Inclusion Initiative implementation with sustainability mechanisms ensuring impact beyond G20 presidency cycle.

Medium-Term Strategic Development

Legal Equality Acceleration: Fast-track 300-year timeline for full legal equality through coordinated G20 action addressing systematic barrier removal, implementation gap closure, and evidence-based reform utilising World Bank Women, Business and Law frameworks.

Care Economy Infrastructure Recognition: Establish care work as fundable infrastructure rather than charitable activity through national care strategy development, adequate funding mechanism establishment, and comprehensive policy framework integration across G20 economies.

Climate Justice Integration: Implement gender-responsive renewable energy policies ensuring women's leadership across value chains, scale rural digital transformation programs, and integrate health system gender medicine principles across G20 health systems and medical training programs.

Long-Term Transformation Objectives

Economic Integration Acceleration: Achievement of women's economic inclusion by 2093 acceleration through coordinated global action, system redesign enabling women to shape institutional frameworks rather than conform to patriarchal structures, and comprehensive rural-urban integration eliminating digital divides through infrastructure and skills development.



Intergenerational Leadership Development: Systematic integration of youth leadership with senior expertise creating sustainable knowledge transfer and innovation pipelines, community-led transformation recognition positioning informal economies and grassroots innovations as systemic change drivers rather than development aid recipients.

Global Framework Integration: Climate justice achievement through gender equality integration into all climate and energy policies, health equity realisation through medical research and health system design transformation, and comprehensive human rights framework integration with environmental justice imperatives.

IMPLEMENTATION MONITORING AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Progress Measurement Frameworks

Enhanced Brisbane Goal targets requiring 50% reduction in female labour force participation gaps over the next decade, 35% reduction in gender pay gaps, 25-50% closure of childcare policy gaps by 2035, and comprehensive time-use data collection for unpaid care work measurement.

Partnership Accountability Mechanisms

Corporate partnership frameworks scaling successful models across G20 regions, binding STEM equity policies with gender audits and equity-linked funding, legal accountability ensuring consistent prosecution of gender-based violence cases, and G20-wide survivor leadership networks in STEM fields.

Financial Resource Mobilisation

Women Unlocking Trillions coalition launch with engagement strategies for G20 finance ministers and central banks, G20 STEM Resilience Fund establishment for trauma-informed survivor-led interventions, and South-South knowledge exchange mechanisms for best practice sharing.



CONCLUSION

The W20 South Africa Inception Meeting represents a paradigmatic shift in multilateral gender equality engagement, moving beyond traditional advocacy frameworks to establish comprehensive implementation pathways linking global policy development with community-level transformation. The meeting's unprecedented integration of care economy recognition, financial inclusion advancement, gender-based violence prevention, climate justice imperatives, health equity requirements, and digital transformation opportunities positions the W20 as a transformative force within global economic governance structures.

The emphasis on African leadership models, particularly through demonstrated investment frameworks, climate resilience initiatives, and technology creation approaches, provides concrete alternatives to conventional development paradigms that the global South can leverage and scale globally. The recognition of rural women as critical climate adaptation agents, combined with successful digital transformation models achieving measurable economic impact, demonstrates the W20's capacity to drive both immediate practical outcomes and long-term systemic transformation.

The integration of Pan-African coordination mechanisms with corporate billion-dollar investment commitments and community-based programme models establishes a comprehensive framework for scaling evidence-based interventions that recognise informal economies and grassroots innovations as transformation drivers rather than aid recipients. The powerful grassroots voices and real-time mentorship demonstrations exemplify the W20's evolution toward implementation acceleration, creating direct pathways between global policy frameworks and community-led solutions.

The urgent recognition of global rights rollback adds critical dimensions requiring both defensive strategies to protect existing gains and offensive approaches to accelerate transformation. The meeting's comprehensive approach—integrating legal reform, investment innovation, narrative change, systemic power transformation, climate justice, and health equity—positions this presidency as potentially the most transformative in W20 history.

Minister Sindisiwe Chikunga concluding declaration—"This is not the end of a conversation—it is the beginning of a mobilisation"—captures the transformative potential of this historic moment in the global gender equality movement. The meeting's conclusion with direct mentorship exchanges between senior business leaders and grassroots entrepreneurs, combined with youth demands to be "centered and lead from the front," demonstrates the W20's capacity to create immediate practical impact while establishing sustainable leadership pipeline development ensuring gender equality gains across generations and geographic contexts.

The emphasis on survivor leadership, intersectional feminism, questioning of binary gender constructs, and integration of human rights frameworks with environmental justice positions this W20 presidency as transformative in scope and ambition, embracing comprehensive societal transformation that addresses historical exclusions while building sustainable, equitable futures for all women and girls.



*Closing remarks by head of delegation W20SA-2025 Prof Narnia Bohler-Muller
“When women lead, communities flourish. Let’s build a future we can proudly pass on to generations to come”*



Scan the QR code above for a copy of the full programme and speaker bios



INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERSHIPS AND GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES

Multilateral Collaboration Framework

The meeting established robust partnerships across multiple stakeholder categories including:

Government Representation: Ministry of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities in the Presidency; Department of Electricity and Energy in the Presidency; Presidential Climate Commission; Premier of the Western Cape and the First Lady; and Western Cape Provincial Government representatives.

Research and Academic Institutions: Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC); Global Summit of Women; African Centre for Economic Transformation (ACET); leading universities in South Africa; Harvard Kennedy Women's Alumni Network (HKSWAN); and Sapiens Research and Analysis (India).

Civil Society Organisations: Pan African Women's Organisation (PAWO); Western Cape Province CSOs supported by Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator; SmartStart; Wow Mom (Kenya); GRIT; WomHub and South African BRICS Youth Association (SABYA).

International Organisations: UN Women South Africa Multi-Country Office; World Bank Women Business and Law initiative (WBL); German Corporation GIZ; International Development Research Centre (IDRC); Global Alliance for Care; and W20 Troika representatives from United States and Brazil.

Private Sector Engagement: Shoprite Group; WIPHOLD; SASOL; Creative Development; Microsoft South Africa; Google South Africa; GSMA, representing diverse sectors from retail to technology.

Other G20 Engagement Groups: Business 20; G20 Empower Alliance; Oceans 20; Think 20; Values 20; and Youth 20.



Sponsors and Funders



Canada



Inspiring new ways



Partners

