



# WOMEN AND THE G20: AMPLIFYING VOICES FOR GENDER EQUALITY AND ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

A W20-UN Women Partnership Outreach Drive

## BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

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The Group of Twenty (G20) is an international forum comprising 19 developed and developing countries, along with the European Union (EU) and the African Union (AU), to address global economic issues.

Established in 1999 as an informal platform for finance ministers and central bank governors from the world's 20 most significant economies, the G20 emerged in response to the Asian financial crisis of 1997-98. Its initial aim was to mitigate the financial repercussions and contagion effects of the Asian financial crisis, as well as other crises like the Mexican peso crisis of 1994 and the Russian financial crisis of 1998. In the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis, the G20 was elevated to the level of heads of state and government, becoming the premier forum for international economic cooperation. Initially focused on broad macroeconomic policy, the G20's agenda has since expanded to encompass governance, finance, the digital economy, education, agriculture, trade, sustainable development, energy transitions, health, climate change, and environmental issues. The G20's mission is to unite the world's major economies to discuss and coordinate economic and financial policies, fostering a more stable and prosperous global economy through international cooperation and coordination.

To incorporate diverse perspectives, G20 members facilitate dialogue through various engagement groups. These groups frequently develop recommendations for G20 Leaders, contributing to the policymaking process. In this context, the Women20 (W20) serves as the official engagement group of the G20 focused on gender equity and women's economic empowerment, bringing together women leaders from civil society, business, entrepreneurship, think tanks, and academia to ensure that gender considerations are mainstreamed into G20 discussions and translate into actionable policies.

### W20-UN WOMEN PARTNERSHIP: CATALYSING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Following the adoption of the UN Pact of the Future in September 2024 and building on the momentum of previous W20 Summits, the W20 South Africa Chapter in partnership with UN Women South Africa Multi-Country Office (SAMCO) will conduct a comprehensive outreach drive across South Africa. This initiative aims to amplify women's voices in economic decision-making and advance gender equality through grassroots mobilisation and capacity building.

This outreach drive directly aligns with the strategic objectives of UN Women's Beijing +30, Generation Equality, and the W20's core mission:

- **Economic Empowerment of Women:** The drive will focus on identifying and addressing barriers to women's full economic participation, promoting entrepreneurship, financial inclusion, and equal access to economic opportunities. This directly supports the W20's mandate to advance women's economic empowerment and the Beijing +30 goal of economic empowerment for women.
- **Women's Leadership and Political Participation:** By engaging women from diverse backgrounds across South Africa, the initiative will build a pipeline of women leaders equipped to influence policy at local, national, and international levels. This aligns with the Generation Equality objective of increasing women's leadership in all spheres.
- **Inclusive Economic Policymaking:** The outreach will gather insights from women at the grassroots level to inform W20 policy recommendations, ensuring that the voices of marginalised and underrepresented women are heard in global economic forums. This supports the W20 principle of inclusive representation.
- **Digital and Financial Inclusion:** Recognising the digital divide's gendered dimensions, the drive will emphasise digital literacy and financial inclusion as key enablers of women's economic participation. This aligns with the W20's focus on bridging the digital gender gap.
- **Sustainable Development and Climate Action:** The initiative will explore the intersection of gender equality and sustainable development, recognising women as key agents of change in climate action and green economies. This supports SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 13 (Climate Action).

By conducting this outreach drive, the W20 and UN Women aim to create a robust network of women advocates who can influence economic policies at all levels, from community initiatives to G20 declarations.

This W20-UN Women partnership outreach drive represents a critical opportunity to ensure that South African young women's voices are heard in global economic governance. By bridging the gap between grassroots experiences and international policy forums, this initiative will contribute to more inclusive and gender-responsive economic policies that benefit all members of society. The drive will not only prepare South Africa's contribution to the W20 but also create lasting structures for women's economic advocacy and empowerment across the country.

## **OBJECTIVES**

- To raise awareness about the W20's role in advancing women's economic empowerment and gender equality within the G20 framework.
- To identify and document key challenges facing women's economic participation across diverse South African communities.
- To build capacity among young women leaders, entrepreneurs, and advocates on economic policy, financial literacy, and digital skills.
- To create a platform for dialogue between grassroots women's organisations and W20 representatives.
- To develop concrete policy recommendations that reflect the diverse experiences and needs of South African young women for submission to the W20.

## **EXPECTED OUTCOMES**

- Establishment of a nationwide network of young women advocates connected to the W20 agenda.
- Documentation of key barriers and opportunities for women's economic empowerment in South Africa.
- Enhanced capacity of at least 200 young women leaders in economic policy advocacy.
- Creation of sustainable partnerships between local women's organisations and the W20.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The outreach drive will employ a multi-pronged approach led by the W20 South Africa Chapter with support from UN Women:

- Provincial Roadshows: Conduct workshops in 3 provinces, ensuring representation from urban, peri-urban, and rural communities.
- Partnership Mobilisation: Collaborate with existing young women's organisations, business associations, and civil society groups to maximise reach.
- Documentation and Research: Conduct surveys and focus groups to gather quantitative and qualitative data on young women's economic experiences.

## **TARGET AUDIENCE**

- Young women professionals and students.
- Women's rights organisations and gender advocates,
- Women with disabilities and their representative organisations.
- Indigenous women and traditional leaders.

## W20 OUTREACH EVENT, CAPE TOWN

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### BACKGROUND

The Cape Town W20 Outreach event was hosted at WomHub in Cape Town on Friday, 12 September 2025. About 60 undergraduate and postgraduate students, researchers, and practitioners gathered for an engaging and inspirational intergenerational discussion.

Co-hosted by W20, UN Women, and WomHub, the session created a dynamic space to reflect on one of the most pressing issues facing young women in STEM today: how to successfully navigate the journey from education into meaningful STEM careers.

The event consisted of welcome remarks by Ms Naadiya Moosajee, co-founder of WomHub and WomEng, and also a dynamic engineer and entrepreneur, who introduced the G20 and various engagement groups. Ms Neo Mofokeng, a programme analyst and strategic policy advisor at UN Women, shared about the importance of the UN Women and W20 collaboration.



### FOCUS OF THE EVENT

Dr Lorenza Fluks set the scene for the day on why we are focusing on the education-to-employment gap. Notably, the numbers tell a troubling story. Around the world, women are earning STEM degrees in increasing numbers, which is excellent progress, but too many are not making it into the workforce or are leaving shortly after they begin. This dropout is often referred to as the leaky STEM pipeline. The gender gap in STEM is about more than jobs. It's about lost innovation, lost leadership, and lost opportunities to solve the world's biggest challenges with the diversity of thought and talent that women bring. When women are excluded, economies and societies lose out. Bridging this gap means looking closely at the multi-layered

and often intersecting barriers that essentially push women out of the system. We asked: How can we create pathways that ensure women thrive, not just survive, in STEM careers? Especially in the context of high unemployment in South Africa, even a degree in STEM fields does not guarantee students a job after graduation. The session, therefore, aimed to bring students into conversation with women trailblazers in STEM to talk about their diverse career paths and what it is like to navigate a career in STEM as a woman.



## DISCUSSION

From the outset, the event set out to go beyond theory, with the intention of sharing life lessons with the students. Speakers openly shared their real-life journeys, breaking barriers and highlighting the resilience, determination, and creativity it takes to thrive in male-dominated fields. The first roundtable was facilitated by Dr Dane Isaacs, from HSRC and W20 South Africa delegate.

Emma Mphahlele from the UN Women GirlsWhoCode Initiative emphasised the importance of global solidarity in ensuring that young women gain digital skills for the future, and the importance of engaging girls at a young age, as well as the value of mentorship.

Lisa Adams, founder of Citizen Code, shared insights from her experience developing tech solutions for social impact. She also reflected on how the tech sector remains largely male-dominated, with a prevailing “bro culture” that often pressures women to assimilate in order to survive. The discussion underscored the need to transform workplace cultures — creating environments where women can truly thrive, not just survive.

Fatima Jakoet is South Africa’s first Muslim female pilot to fly commercial airplanes. She spoke passionately about her work as a pilot, engineer, and social entrepreneur at the Sakhikamva Foundation.

Prof Anita Bosch from Stellenbosch Business School joined the conversation online and shared some of the insights from her research on women and work. A key point she highlighted was that many black young professionals, especially those that are first-generation university graduates, may experience that the

professional workplaces and especially in male-dominated STEM fields, are “not ready to receive them”. This means that young people might find it hard to adapt to new workspaces and cultures.

The second roundtable was facilitated by Dr Lorenza Fluks. This session was framed as an un-panel discussion, where we identified a couple of “seed panellists” to respond to the question of what it takes to navigate a career in STEM. Building on the insights and the conversational tone of the first session, the speakers continued to share their insights and invite conversation. They included: Philadelphia Vutivi Ngobeni, a doctoral researcher in civil engineering at UCT, and Dr Nikita Pillay, a postdoctoral fellow at Stellenbosch Business School, who each highlighted how STEM research and leadership can open doors while also exposing the persistent barriers women continue to face. Ms Ngobeni brought the important issue of navigating motherhood and work, as well as the importance of boundaries and self-care.

Serisha Barrat, founder and CEO of LawyeredUP, reminded participants of the power of entrepreneurship in reimagining career pathways. She also emphasised the importance of using AI in everyday life and work, as well as using it for developing solutions.



## OUTCOMES

Overall, the discussions were interactive and informal, with students actively engaging speakers on how global leaders, and especially the G20 through the W20 engagement group, could respond to their aspirations for inclusion and economic opportunity. What stood out was the diverse paths of all the speakers, emphasising to the young students to truly get to know themselves, their passions, and what problems they would like to solve in the world.

The event established connections between students in STEM and professionals in the field. Participants exchanged contact details, and some will aim to keep the connections going, with social media connections as a key means of communication and connection.

The event highlighted the need for more such events where students can be exposed to entrepreneurship and the different options and pathways they could follow after completing their degrees and not feel stuck if they should end up not securing their dream job.

The event closed with a strong message: South Africa's young women in STEM are ready to take up space, contribute solutions, and shape the digital economy. Their voices, grounded in lived experience, are vital to informing the policy advocacy that W20 brings to the global stage.



# W20 OUTREACH EVENT, SWEETWATERS, KWAZULU-NATAL

**Date:** 22 September 2025

**Venue:** Anew Hotel, Hilton, Pietermaritzburg

## BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The W20 (Women 20) is an official G20 engagement group established in 2015 to ensure that women's voices are heard in global decision-making. Ahead of the W20 South Africa Summit (12–14 October 2025), outreach activities have been organised across the country to raise awareness, amplify local voices, and connect grassroots realities with the W20 global process.

The Sweetwaters outreach, convened in partnership by HSRC, UN Women, and Harambee, specifically engaged young unemployed women (18–34 years) to:

- Build awareness about the W20/G20.
- Create a space to share challenges, priorities, and aspirations.
- Feed these perspectives into South Africa's contribution to the W20.
- Provide immediate value through a skills development workshop.



## PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

The day was facilitated by Victoria Duncan, bringing her expertise as Harambee Head of Research and Chair of the W20 Care Economy Task Team.

- Welcome and Background: Victoria Duncan welcomed participants, followed by Dr Zaynab Essack introducing the G20/W20, their mandates, and why local voices matter in shaping global commitments.

- Consent and Icebreaker: Ayanda Tshazi (HSRC) guided participants through the consent process and facilitated an engaging opening activity.
- Keynote Speakers:
  1. Neo Mofokeng (UN Women): Grounded her keynote in the principle of gender equity, linking W20's mandate to global governance and sustainable development.
  2. Zikhona Nyathi (KwaZulu-Natal Civil Society Forum): Shared practical guidance on business registration, compliance, and tenders, framed by her "3 Cs" – Compliance, Consistency, and Commitment.
- Dialogue Sessions: HSRC facilitated small-group discussions with 38 young women divided into four groups. Participants reflected on their awareness of the G20/W20, the challenges they face, and their advice for South African and global leaders.
- Skills Development Workshop: Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator (Harambee) delivered a session on employability and job-seeking skills, linking directly to W20 priorities around women's economic empowerment and the care economy. The session focused on introducing participants to the SA Youth Platform, a linking and matching platform designed for inclusion, which enables young people in South Africa to work-see for free.
- Video: Willing participants creating a collective visual message to be shared at the W20 Summit.

## DIALOGUE FEEDBACK

HSRC facilitated small-group discussions where participants reflected on their awareness of the G20/W20, the challenges they face, and their advice for leaders. Participants were divided into four groups, with each group selecting a note-taker and presenter.

### **Guiding Questions:**

1. Before today, had you ever heard of the G20 or W20? If yes, what did you know and where did you hear it? How could such bodies support young women like you?
2. If you could give one piece of advice to the President of South Africa about improving life for young women, what would it be? What do young women in KZN need most?

The following issues and recommendations were made by young women in KZN.





## **AWARENESS**

Across all four groups, only a handful of participants had ever heard of the G20, and almost none knew of the W20. For most, this session represented their first engagement with a global governance platform addressing women's issues. The outreach therefore played a critical role in bridging global and local knowledge gaps.

## **CORE THEMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

- ***Jobs and Economic Empowerment***
  1. Create more job opportunities for women, particularly in rural and township areas.
  2. Remove prior work experience requirements for entry-level jobs.
  3. Allocate government tenders fairly and promote access for women-owned businesses.
  4. Provide entrepreneurship and business training for young black women, including practical compliance and financial literacy.
  5. Support women in obtaining driver's licences to improve employability and mobility.
  
- ***Education and Skills Development***
  1. Begin skills development at school level and integrate practical and vocational training alongside academic theory.
  2. Invest in STEM education, digital literacy, and entrepreneurship development.
  3. Create empowerment workshops on self-confidence, self-love, and resilience to counter generational narratives that encourage women to endure inequality and abuse.
  4. Establish youth networking and leadership platforms for peer learning and mentorship.
  
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- **Safety, Protection, and Justice**
  1. Reinstate life sentences for rape and other severe GBV-related crimes.
  2. Offer self-defence workshops to address daily safety threats.
  3. Expand GBV prevention and protection services and campaigns encouraging reporting of sexual violence, especially acquaintance rape and incest.
  4. Educate parents and families to support survivors and end the silence surrounding sexual abuse within households.
  5. Ensure safe community spaces for young women to learn, work, and thrive.
- **Healthcare and Well-being**
  1. Improve public healthcare to meet private healthcare standards.
  2. Strengthen privacy and confidentiality in clinics, particularly around HIV testing and pregnancy-related visits. Participants highlighted that personal information is often shared publicly in waiting areas, causing embarrassment and discouraging service uptake.
  3. Expand youth-friendly reproductive and mental health services.
  4. Provide free or subsidised sanitary towels for all women and girls.
  5. Deliver inclusive sexuality education to reduce stigma around sexual orientation and reproductive health.
- **Governance and Accountability**
  1. Hold ward councillors accountable for community service beyond election cycles.
  2. Increase representation of black women in senior management and leadership roles.
  3. Require companies to return CVs or provide feedback to unsuccessful applicants to improve transparency.
  4. Address illegal immigration concerns through transparent, rights-based approaches that balance local job protection and human rights.
- **Recognition of Care Work**
  1. Recognise and value unpaid care responsibilities carried by young women.
  2. Provide affordable childcare services to reduce the care burden and enable women's participation in education and work.

## DEBATES AND DIVERGENT PERSPECTIVES

Participants engaged in robust debate, revealing diversity of thought and lived experience. One participant's call to end the child support grant was met with strong disagreement, with others emphasising the importance of the grant for child welfare and poverty alleviation. This exchange reflected the complex, sometimes conflicting perspectives of young women navigating structural inequality.

## NEXT STEPS

Participants asked how their views would reach the President and decision-makers. Facilitators explained that these insights would be compiled into South Africa's W20 submission and reflected in the W20 Summit Communiqué in October 2025. The organisers reaffirmed their commitment to amplifying these voices in national and international advocacy spaces.

## IMPACT AND REFLECTIONS

The outreach achieved three key impacts:

1. **Awareness Raised:** Participants left with new knowledge about the G20/W20 and their role in shaping global agendas.
2. **Voices Amplified:** The priorities of young women in KwaZulu-Natal were documented and will inform South Africa's W20 advocacy.
3. **Local-Global Linkages:** The session demonstrated how W20's themes of Health Equity and Care Economy connect with lived realities such as GBV, unemployment, and lack of access to healthcare.

Participants expressed reassurance that women’s issues are being prioritised. They also asked how their views would reach leaders. Organisers explained that these perspectives will be compiled into the South African contribution to the W20 Communiqué and shared at the W20 Summit in October 2025.

These sessions will inform a panel session at the W20 Summit.



## CONCLUSION

The W20 Sweetwaters’ Outreach highlighted the power of collaboration between HSRC, UN Women, and Harambee. The event amplified voices often excluded from global processes.

The priorities raised, from jobs, education, and healthcare to GBV protection, governance accountability, and recognition of care work, reflect the urgent needs of young women in KwaZulu-Natal. These voices will inform South Africa’s advocacy at the W20 Summit, ensuring that grassroots realities contribute to shaping global commitments for gender equity.



## W20 OUTREACH EVENT, GAUTENG

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### CONTEXT AND PURPOSE

On Tuesday, 30 September 2025, the Centre for the Study of Race, Gender and Class at the University of Johannesburg hosted one of the W20 Outreach dialogues. The event brought together 34 participants, including students, university staff, media representatives and partner organisations. It formed part of a collaborative effort between CSRGC, UN Women, the Human Sciences Research Council, Crive Development and the Africa Women Financial Inclusion Initiative (AFWII). The dialogue focused on the theme, Mainstreaming gender in G20 policy making, Advancing economic justice for young women. Within the context of South Africa's G20 presidency in 2025, the purpose was to translate global commitments into local actions that reflect the lived realities of young women in South Africa.

Prof Tinuade Ojo, Director of CSRGC, opened the session by welcoming participants and positioning the outreach as a practical bridge between international policy frameworks and local aspirations. She noted that G20 policies on finance, education and innovation can expand or constrain opportunities, and that meaningful progress depends on gender-responsive policy choices. Her remarks set a clear expectation that universities, researchers, international organisations and specialised initiatives must work together to produce measurable gains for young women.



## DISCUSSIONS

Dr Odilile Ayodele of the HSRC moderated a panel that featured Ms Tendai Mugabe of AWFII, Ms Hlengiwe Magubane of Crtve Development, Ms Neo Mofokeng of UN Women, and Ms Lebogang Ayobiojo from UJ Community Engagement. The discussion flowed as a connected narrative rather than separate talks. Each speaker built on the previous insights, and together they located economic justice at the centre of leadership, education and participation. Bringing the perspective of the host institution, Ms Ayobiojo illustrated the role of universities as conveners and connectors. She highlighted community engagement platforms that create safe spaces, mentorship pathways and work-integrated learning. These can support young women to move from aspiration to implementation and can also help channel student voice into local policy processes.



By the close of the conversation, several messages stood out.

- Economic justice is foundational, since it underpins leadership, education and participation.
- Youth are drivers of change; therefore, their creativity and lived realities must inform policy design.
- Global commitments matter only when they are translated into concrete local pathways that reach classrooms, communities and workplaces.
- Digital and financial inclusion are enablers of opportunity, which means device access, affordable connectivity, and literacy should be treated as basic infrastructure for participation.



## OUTCOMES

The event created a shared understanding of W20 priorities, and it produced an initial set of contributions for submission to W20 workstreams. Partners agreed to continue collaboration to develop programming for young women and translate ideas into meaningful commitments. The collaboration demonstrated how academic institutions, international organisations and specialised initiatives can work together to advance women's economic empowerment across Africa.

Photo credits: HSRC and UJ CSRGC Outreach Team.





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