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COMMENTARY

G20 South Africa Summit 2025

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1. Introduction

The 2025 G20 Summit, the first ever held on African soil, was a historic gathering that took place in Johannesburg, South Africa, on November 22–23 in 2025. Against the backdrop of global economic uncertainty, climate pressures, and geopolitical tensions, the summit focused on the themes Solidarity, Equality and Sustainability. Leaders and delegates arrived with a shared purpose to helping developing nations adapt to the climate crisis, transitioning to clean energy and cutting excessive debt (South African Government, 2025).

Over two days, more than 42 countries and institutions convened excluding the United States, which had condemned South Africa's selection as host. South Africa, serving as the chair, extended invitations to several guest nations and international organizations, including continental and regional cooperation bodies such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC, 2025). The summit concluded with a bold declaration to build a more inclusive and resilient global economy. On November 23, leaders announced commitments spanning Africa's industrialization and growth, disaster resilience, clean energy transitions, critical minerals development, food security, financial stability, and responsible artificial intelligence (AI) innovation (SADC, 2025).

This Johannesburg summit was not just a forum for negotiation, it was a statement of Africa's growing influence in global governance, an opportunity for the Global South to assert its priorities, and a reminder that the future of the world economy depends on collaboration and shared responsibility (PBS News ,2025).

2. G20 Summit: Overview

The Group of Twenty (G20) was established in 1999 in response to the Asian financial crisis as a forum for finance ministers and central bank governors from major economies to discuss pressing global financial issues (World Economic Forum, 2025). Following the 2007–2009 global financial crisis, the G20 expanded to include a summit for heads of state and government. Since 2008, these leaders have met annually, supported by a series of ministerial meetings, Sherpa consultations (Sherpas are personal representatives of G20 leaders who oversee negotiations, discuss agenda points, and coordinate much of the summit's work), working groups, and special events.

The G20 comprises major economies that account for approximately 85% of the world's GDP, more than 75% of global trade, and around two-thirds of the planet's population (World Economic Forum, 2025). The forum includes 19 countries and two regional bodies. The current members are Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, the Republic of Korea, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States, along

with the African Union and the European Union (World Economic Forum, 2025).

Figure 1 below illustrates the member countries of the G20.

Figure 1: G20 Member countries



Source: Onlypias (2025).

G20 operates without a permanent secretariat, with the presidency rotating annually. The G20 follows two parallel tracks: the Finance Track, led by finance ministers and central bank governors, and the Sherpa Track, led by government representatives who prepare leaders' agendas (G20,2025). Additionally, Engagement Groups comprising civil society, parliamentarians, youth, labor organizations, businesses, and researchers ensure diverse perspectives are included. Continuity is maintained through the G20 troika, consisting of the current, previous, and next host countries: South Africa (current), Brazil (past), and the United States (next) (TIME Africa, 2025).

3.South Africa's landmark G20 Presidency

South Africa's presidency of the G20 marks a historic moment for both Africa and the Global South. For the first time, G20 leaders convened on African soil, embracing the spirit of Ubuntu, which emphasizes interconnectedness with the principle "I am because we are" (Polity, 2025). The summit underscored the notion that nations cannot thrive in isolation; global prosperity requires cooperation, solidarity, and inclusive growth.

President Cyril Ramaphosa articulated the dual goals of the presidency: to advance South Africa's growth and create employment opportunities while contributing to global stability and equitable economic progress. In the lead-up to the summit, South Africa hosted over 130

meetings and welcomed tens of thousands of delegates from around the world, showcasing the country's ability to convene on a global scale (South African Government, 2025).

Through this summit, South Africa asserted its role as a key player in international diplomacy, demonstrating Africa's potential to influence global economic agendas and advocate for the priorities of the Global South.

4. Major Global Agreements Reached

The 2025 G20 Summit resulted in several landmark agreements that reflect a renewed commitment to global solidarity and sustainability:

1. **Climate and Energy Transition:** G20 leaders vowed to accelerate the transition to clean energy. They committed to phasing out fossil fuel subsidies, investing in renewable infrastructure, and expanding climate financing for developing nations. Special attention was given to energy access in Africa and other emerging markets, recognizing energy as both a development and climate challenge.

2. **Debt and Financial Stability:** The summit addressed the excessive debt burdens faced by developing countries. A framework for debt restructuring and responsible lending was endorsed, aimed at preventing financial crises while enabling countries to invest in resilient infrastructure, education, and healthcare.

3. **Food Security:** G20 leaders reached an agreement on measures to tackle rising global food insecurity, including stabilizing agricultural markets, reducing food waste, and promoting disaster-resilient farming practices. A global fund for climate-smart agriculture was proposed to support nations in these endeavors.

4. **Artificial Intelligence (AI):** Leaders emphasized the importance of ethical and responsible AI innovation. They promoted governance frameworks designed to prevent bias, protect privacy, and ensure equitable access to the benefits of technology.

5. **Critical Minerals and Industrialization:** Countries agreed to collaborate strategically on critical minerals essential for green technologies, balancing value chains with environmental sustainability. This collaboration also focuses on initiatives to promote industrialization and job creation, particularly in Africa (DIRCO, 2025).

5. The Significance of the 2025 G20 Summit for KwaZulu-Natal

The recent G20 Summit, hosted under South Africa's presidency, has significant implications for the province of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). The country's participation in this global forum not only highlights its achievements but also presents substantial opportunities to leverage its influence and resources for promoting economic models that benefit developing regions like KZN (UKZN, 2025).

KZN hosted several key G20 meetings, showcasing its commitment to global discussions and leadership across various sectors. Notable events in 2025 included the G20 Health Working Group meeting in March, which took place in Ballito over three days (G20 South Africa, 2025). Additionally, KZN hosted the G20 Agriculture Working Group and Food Security Task Force from April 23–25 in Durban, the hub of the eThekweni metro. This was a significant milestone, as beneficiaries of the Agribusiness Development Agency (ADA) displayed their products during this gathering (ADA, 2025).

In May 2025, KZN welcomed global delegates for the Second G20 Tourism Meeting. The province's diverse offerings including its rich cultural heritage, natural beauty, world-class hospitality, and innovative capacity underscore its appeal for global tourism partnerships and investments. KZN Premier MrThamsanqa Ntuli stated, "This is more than just a meeting; it's a statement that KZN is ready to lead, connect, and contribute on the global stage." He emphasized the province's honor in hosting world tourism leaders and sharing its vision for a sustainable tourism economy that creates jobs, drives growth, and uplifts communities (SA News, 2025).

At the G20 Town Hall held at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), Dr. Gumede highlighted a significant structural challenge: "You'll find that the infrastructure budgets from the government have accounted for less than 10% of what is needed over the last five years. The amount we spend on infrastructure is significantly lower than what is required to achieve sustainable growth. Considering that Africa, specifically South Africa, has two of the busiest international ports, which could truly lead to regional development, this is a critical issue." (IOL, 2025)

These engagements positioned KZN not merely as a host province but also as a strategic player within South Africa's G20 agenda. The province's exposure to global policymakers, investors, and sector specialists creates an enabling environment for addressing its most pressing socio-economic challenges, particularly infrastructure backlogs, port efficiency, agricultural development, and tourism expansion. By aligning provincial development priorities with broader G20 themes, KZN can utilize this international platform to attract investment, enhance regional competitiveness, and accelerate inclusive growth. Thus, the G20 process can serve as a catalyst for long-term provincial transformation.

6. Conclusion

The Johannesburg G20 Summit represented a significant milestone as the first G20 meeting held on African soil, highlighting the continent's crucial role in global governance. The summit emphasized key themes of solidarity, equality, and sustainability, tackling pressing issues such as climate change, debt relief, and inclusive growth. Importantly, the summit resulted in significant agreements concerning climate, energy, finance, artificial intelligence, and essential minerals. It also achieved targeted outcomes for Africa in areas such as industrialization, food security, and technological advancement. By promoting the philosophy of Ubuntu, the summit highlighted the significance of interconnectedness and shared responsibility for global prosperity. It also resulted in important agreements regarding climate, energy, finance, artificial intelligence, and essential minerals, while also achieving targeted outcomes for Africa in areas like industrialization, food security, and technological advancement. By promoting the philosophy of Ubuntu, the summit highlighted the importance of interconnectedness and shared responsibility for global prosperity. Overall, the outcomes were both historic and ambitious, striving to harmonize economic growth with environmental sustainability and inclusive development, thereby reshaping the narrative for Africa and the Global South.

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