




## Chapter Six

# Accelerating Climate Action and Just Energy Transition Through the G20

Alex Benkenstein 

*Climate and Natural Resources Programme  
South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA)   
Johannesburg, South Africa*

### Abstract

South Africa's G20 presidency takes place at a time of heightened political tensions, with significant challenges for multilateral diplomacy, particularly with regard to climate diplomacy. Nevertheless, opportunities do exist to advance the climate and energy agenda within the G20. In this regard, partnership between Brazil and South Africa must be developed strategically, both in terms of their consecutive G20 presidencies and Brazil's hosting of COP30. The chapter outlines key priority areas for the South African G20 presidency in the context of Brazil's G20 legacy, the shifting international environment, as well as South Africa's stated intent to incorporate African continental priorities into its G20 presidency. Several recommendations are offered on how meaningful outcomes can be achieved on the climate and energy agenda under South Africa's G20 presidency, despite a challenging international environment.

**Key words:** just transition, climate change, adaptation, critical minerals, climate finance

### 1. Introduction

In late 2023, during the first months of Brazil's G20 presidency, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) completed the first global stocktake assessing



progress towards the Paris Agreement climate goals. The results were hard hitting. While recognising progress, the core message was that global efforts were falling far short of what would be required to avoid the worst impacts of climate change. Climate financial commitments to support mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage were also inadequate, particularly in terms of the support required by developing countries for resilience building and just energy transitions. Briefly, the world was not on track to achieve the Paris Agreement climate goals of limiting global temperature rise to well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, ideally no more than 1.5 degrees Celsius. Missing these targets would have significant consequences for societies and economies around the world but would hit the Southern countries hardest, as they had the lowest capacity to adapt to climate impacts. Effective global cooperation around climate change would require a greater level of ambition, particularly in ensuring that climate finance could be mobilised at scale and be effectively channeled to where it was needed most.

Throughout its G20 presidency, Brazil placed significant emphasis on climate justice under its theme of “Building a fair world and a sustainable planet”. The establishment of the Task Force on a Global Mobilization against Climate Change (Task Force Clima) was a clear signal that Brazil viewed climate action as central to the broader effort of ensuring a more just and equitable global order. By the close of its presidency, Brazil had overseen significant engagement on the climate agenda under the G20, yet there were clear indications that challenging times lay ahead. Brazil handed over the G20 presidency to South Africa in November 2024, shortly after the re-election of Donald Trump as President of the United States of America (US). One of Trump’s first actions as president was to announce that the US would withdraw from the Paris Agreement, as it had done during his first term. The transition of the Brazilian presidency to the South African G20 presidency also occurred at the time of the 29<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC (COP29). Billed as the “finance COP”, countries of the South had been calling for \$1.3 trillion in climate finance support at COP29. However,

the hard-fought outcome delivered only a commitment to raise climate finance from the Southern countries to developing countries to \$300 billion by 2035, with a broader “aspiration” to achieve \$1.3 trillion from a range of sources, including the private sector. As the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has highlighted, however, “It is not clear how these sums will be raised and who will deliver the finance”. (UNEP Finance Initiative, 2024)

This chapter assesses the climate and energy agendas of the Brazilian and South African G20 presidencies. It outlines the development of the climate and energy agenda within the G20, positions these engagements within the broader global political context and makes recommendations to support proposals for climate and energy under the South African G20 presidency, with an emphasis on shared priorities by Brazil and South Africa. The focus on Brazil and South Africa is appropriate not just in the context of their consecutive G20 presidencies, but also in light of Brazil’s hosting of COP30 towards the close of 2025.

## **2. Climate and energy in the G20**

G20 member countries account for over 80% of global economic output and energy demand, as well as about three quarters of global carbon emissions (Laguzzi, 2024). To a significant extent, the world’s ability to avoid the worst impacts of climate change will be determined by actions taken by G20 member countries. This relates not only to actions that they can take in curbing their own emissions and adapting to climate change, but also their role in providing financing for climate action in developing countries.

The G20’s engagement on climate and energy issues has progressively expanded as it broadened its focus from a narrow concern with international financial cooperation following the financial crises of 1997–1998 and 2008. While only passing mention was made to climate change in the first G20 Leaders’ Declaration in 2008, this was expanded in the two G20 summits convened in 2009. The G20 recognised climate change as a significant threat requiring a coordinated

global response, with an explicit commitment of support to the UNFCCC climate negotiations. There was also engagement on the energy transition, with a commitment to reduce inefficient fossil fuel subsidies and enhance investment in clean energy and energy efficiency.

In subsequent years, climate and energy were to gradually become more prominent on the G20 agenda. A Climate Finance Study Group was established during the Mexico G20 presidency in 2012, and a Sustainability Working Group was established under the Sherpa Track during the German presidency in 2017. The following year, under the Argentinian G20 presidency, energy and climate discussions were separated by splitting the Sustainability Working Group into an Energy Sustainability Working Group and a Climate Sustainability Working Group, a move not welcomed by all G20 members. Nevertheless, an important evolution under the Argentinian presidency was the establishment of the Adaptation Work Programme, which ensured that the climate debate within the G20 was not dominated by a focus on mitigation. Adaptation has long been a priority for the Southern countries, which have limited capacity to adapt to climate impacts due to underdeveloped infrastructure, limited fiscal space and other constraints. A further significant development occurred under the Italian G20 presidency in 2021, when the Sustainable Finance Study Group was elevated to a Working Group and a Sustainable Finance Roadmap was endorsed. The Roadmap includes as one of its focus areas the assessment and management of climate and other sustainability risks.

The 2022 Indonesia G20 presidency was marked by tensions around wording related to Russia-Ukraine conflict, which resulted in numerous G20 meetings that concluded without consensus statements. Nevertheless, progress was made on various fronts, including climate and the just energy transition. Examples include the adoption of the G20 Bali Common Principles in Accelerating Clean Energy Transition, which emerged from deliberations of the Energy Transition Working Group, and the Transition Finance Framework, produced through the Sustainable Finance Working Group.

The Indian presidency saw further progress, with the institutionalisation of the Disaster Risk Reduction Working Group under the Sherpa Track, engagement around critical minerals, and the establishment of the Deccan High-Level Principles on Food Security and Nutrition and the Chennai High-Level Principles for Blue/Ocean Economy, both of which included climate-related actions (Government of India, 2023).

### **3. The Brazilian G20 climate and energy agenda**

As an influential middle power, Brazil has long championed environmental concerns in its international diplomacy. While both domestic and international environmental action had diminished under the conservative administration of President Jaire Bolsonaro, the election of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in late 2022 set the stage for a revitalisation of Brazil's environmental diplomacy, paired with domestic action such as addressing deforestation and other forms of environmental degradation.

Speaking at the September 2023 G20 Summit under the Indian presidency, President Lula highlighted three priorities for Brazil's upcoming presidency, namely 1) Social inclusion and the fight against hunger and poverty; 2) Promotion of sustainable development in its social, economic and environmental dimensions and energy transitions; and 3) The reform of global governance institutions. Climate change featured prominently in this and later speeches, with a particular emphasis on the disproportionate impact of climate change on vulnerable groups. These priorities were also reflected in the issue note outlining the priorities of the Brazilian G20 presidency, which drew attention to the cross-cutting nature of the sustainable development and social inclusion agendas, called for leadership by G20 countries in addressing climate change, and highlighted that climate action is necessary not only for the environment but also for the long-term resilience of economies and societies. The issue notes further drew attention to the urgency of a global transition to less carbon-intensive economic models in the context of a just transition. In this domain, there was a particular focus on social dimension of energy transitions,

“considering the pros and cons of transition options and how they unevenly impact local communities, women and different ethnic groups” (Government of Brazil, 2023).

Task Force Clima was established to draw on the expertise of both the sherpa and finance tracks, with a stated focus on 1) The role of national sustainability transformation plans and economy-wide platforms, and 2) A renewed agenda for the engagement of the financial sector in climate action. Notwithstanding the work under Task Force Clima, climate change and energy priorities would also be pursued across a number of working groups, most notably the Environment and Climate Sustainability Working Group (focusing on 1. Emergency and preventive adaptation to extreme climate events, 2. Payments for ecosystem services, 3. Oceans, and 4. Waste and circular economy); the Sustainable Finance Working Group (focusing on 1. Optimizing access to international environment and climate funds, 2. Advancing credible, robust and just transition plans, 3. Implementing sustainability reporting requirements that work for all, and 4. Financing nature-based solutions), and the Energy Transitions Working Group (focusing on 1. Accelerating financing for energy transitions, 2. The Social dimensions of the energy transition, and 3. Innovative perspectives on sustainable fuels).

#### **4. Assessing the climate and energy outcomes of the Brazilian G20 presidency**

Throughout the Brazilian presidency 134 four meetings were convened, 24 at ministerial level. A range of outcome documents were produced through the various working groups and task forces. The G20’s 13 engagement groups also convened a number of meetings and produced communiqués, including, critically, the first G20 Social Summit, which provided a platform for broad stakeholder participation within G20 processes.

The climate-related outcomes across all working groups and task forces are too broad and varied to be fully described here, but have been summarised elsewhere (Government of Brazil, 2023). The emphasis in this chapter will be in the

framing expressed within the G20 Summit Declaration (Rio Declaration) and the outcomes of key working groups and task forces, notably the Environment and Climate Sustainability Working Group and Task Force Clima.

One of the concrete climate-related outcomes of the Brazilian G20 presidency was a launch of the Global Initiative for Information Integrity on Climate Change, which aims to support research and interventions that promote the integrity of climate-related information. This initiative is led by Brazil, the UN Department of Global Communication, and UNESCO. This exemplifies an approach to institutionalise G20 initiatives beyond the G20 itself, thereby contributing to the long-term sustainability of such initiatives, while also ensuring that international action is channelled through existing, established institutions such as UN agencies. This same approach was reflected in the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty, which has an independent governance structure and a support mechanism hosted by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). It is noteworthy that the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty itself recognises the importance of investing in sustainable, climate-resilient food systems as part of addressing the impacts of climate change and other environmental pressures.

One of the key challenges related to the G20 climate agenda is the fact that climate change is a crosscutting issue across a wide set of working groups and task forces. With working groups bringing together officials and ministers from a particular set of ministries (e.g. ministers and officials from finance ministries under the Sustainable Finance Working Group, or ministries for the environment under the Environment and Climate Sustainability Working Group), there are relatively few opportunities for alignment and cross-fertilisation. In this regard, it was considered an important outcome that Task Force Clima could bring together ministers responsible for foreign affairs, finance, environment and climate, as well as central bank governors, to jointly agree to a ministerial statement. The Task Force's outcome document presented a series of recommendations focusing on just national transition planning

and country platforms, together with climate finance, as well as presenting a voluntary framework for transition planning and country platforms.

The Ministerial Declaration from the Environment and Climate Sustainability Working Group drew attention to the need to strengthen scientific knowledge and support capacity building in developing countries for climate action. The declaration also emphasised the need to strengthen financing for adaptation in particular, and in this regard recognized the need to increase the private sector's role in adaptation financing. Reflecting Global South priorities, the Declaration called for retaining climate adaptation as a key priority for the G20, highlighting its centrality to social and economic development.

The Sustainable Finance Working Group presented a series of recommendations across the four priority areas identified under the Brazilian G20 presidency, as well as presenting a progress report across the five focus areas of the Sustainable Finance Roadmap. The Working Group further published a set of high-level principles on “credible, robust and just” transition plans, as well as developing a toolbox on financing for nature-based solutions.

The Energy Transitions Working Group spearheaded the establishment of a Global Coalition for Energy Planning, which will be hosted by the International Renewable Energy Agency. It further produced a set of principles for just and inclusive energy transitions, a roadmap to increase investment in clean energy in the Southern countries, and a variety of other frameworks and technical reports. The Ministerial Statement issued through the working group highlighted the imperative of ensuring an inclusive and just energy transition, with an emphasis on climate finance (in particular, low-cost financing to support energy transitions in developing countries), scaling renewable energy, advancing energy efficiency and investing in research and innovation. The working group also addressed the pressing issue of critical minerals, noting that in this regard “global markets must be built on transparency and sustainability and promote reliable, diversified, sustainable and responsible

supply and value chains, while providing opportunities globally, including through local value addition and beneficiation at source” (Government of Brazil, 2023).

## **5. South Africa’s G20 Priorities**

The Government of South Africa is keenly aware that its G20 presidency comes at the end of a series of Global South presidencies. In this regard, its presidency is an important opportunity to consolidate priorities of the Global South within the G20 agenda. Ensuring continuity between the Brazilian and South African G20 presidencies would be essential in this context. As leading Global South middle powers with strong bilateral relations and shared engagement through global forums such as G20 and BRICS, Brazil and South Africa had a strong foundation on which to build linkages between their G20 presidencies. This was supported by a deep level of engagement by South Africa under the Brazilian presidency in the G20’s troika leadership structure.

South Africa was also clear that it would seek to align its G20 presidency with broader African continental priorities. Having joined the G20 in 2023, the African Union (AU) was a relative newcomer to G20 processes, and the South African presidency would be a key opportunity to consolidate the AU’s G20 engagements. As the only country-level G20 member on the African continent, South Africa is also keenly aware of the need to adopt a regional perspective in its engagements.

The Brazilian presidency’s emphasis on equity and inclusion, both at global and societal levels, has clear echoes in South Africa’s thematic focus on “Solidarity, Equality and Sustainability” under its G20 presidency. This thematic emphasis must, of course, be considered within the international context that shapes the opportunities and constraints for international cooperation. In this regard, the disruptive approach of the US under President Trump is undeniably a significant factor. This relates not only to actions directly related to the climate agenda, such as the US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement and walking back climate finance

commitments, but also the tensions around trade, security cooperation, development assistance and other norms and practices that have long shaped the international system. This international environment undoubtedly shapes South Africa's capacity to drive a particular agenda through its G20 presidency, not only because international tensions will inevitably seep into G20 negotiations, but also because this global instability forces countries to focus on immediate foreign policy concerns.

This difficult international environment was further complicated by direct diplomatic tensions between South Africa and the US early in 2024, triggered by changes to South Africa's land laws that were seen by the US to be unfairly targeting the country's White minority population. These tensions were in clear evidence when US Secretary of State Marco Rubio announced that he would not be attending the first foreign ministers' meeting under the South African G20 presidency, equating South Africa's G20 theme of solidarity, equity and sustainability with "DEI and climate change" and framing South African actions as "anti-Americanism" (Savage, 2025).

With regard to the climate and energy agenda specifically, the South African government has been clear that it sees this as a core element of its broader focus on equality and sustainability. During his remarks at the launch of the South African G20 presidency, President Cyril Ramaphosa highlighted the need to mobilise the G20 presidency to "avert the worst effects of climate change and to preserve our planet for future generations". A number of themes directly or indirectly related to climate change and just energy transitions. Efforts to strengthen disaster resilience, for example, were framed in the context of the increasing rate of climate-induced natural disasters across the world. Financing for a just energy transition was also highlighted, together with a broader effort to increase the quantity and quality of climate finance flows to the South. President Ramaphosa also highlighted that critical minerals would be a priority area, with a focus on how the exploitation of these minerals can contribute to inclusive growth and development, particularly within source countries.

## 6. An African G20

Africa's climate and energy agenda has been expressed through a range of institutions, forums and policy frameworks. The continental development framework, Agenda 2063, highlights the fundamental injustice reflected in the fact that Africa contributes less than 5% of global carbon emissions, yet is disproportionately impacted by climate change. While expressing a commitment to contribute to mitigation, it emphasises the need to prioritise adaptation action and calls for adequate support in these efforts, encompassing technology development and transfer, capacity building, as well as financial and technical resources. These messages have been elaborated and reinforced through the African Union Climate Change and Resilient Development Strategy (2022-2032) and related frameworks such as the Green Recovery Action Plan. The first African Climate Summit, hosted by the African Union and the Government of Kenya in September 2023, resulted in the Nairobi Declaration, another important articulation of African climate priorities. Other bodies, such as the African Group of Negotiators and the Committee of African Heads of State and Government on Climate Change are important actors advocating for African priorities. Common priorities across these frameworks include an emphasis on adaptation, climate finance and a just transition in the context of Africa's energy needs. With regards to the just transition, it is commonly emphasised that 80% of the global population without access to electricity reside in Africa. There is thus an urgent need to scale energy investments significantly – indeed, the Nairobi Declaration calls for renewable energy generation capacity in Africa to increase more than five-fold, from 56 GW in 2022 to at least 300 by 2030.

It is broadly recognised that financing cannot be framed simply within the traditional parameters of climate financing, but must explore the broader dynamics and institutional processes shaping Africa's access to finance. In this regard, there is growing emphasis on addressing the high cost of capital in Africa and, relatedly, addressing the African risk premium. Finally, Africa's climate response must be seen within the context of its broader development and industrialisation

ambitions. For this reason, Africa's position within global clean technology value chains is a key concern. Currently, most batteries, solar panels and other clean technology deployed in Africa are imported from elsewhere. Moreover, Africa's critical minerals, including cobalt, lithium and a range of other minerals, is exported in an unprocessed or minimally processed state, with value addition into intermediate and final goods taking place elsewhere. The African Union has recently adopted the African Green Minerals Strategy, which seeks to enhance the responsible development of the continent's critical minerals and promote local processing and value addition. These ambitions are in line with the objectives of the African Mining Vision, adopted in 2009 as a framework to guide mineral-led industrialisation on in Africa.

Beyond its domestic industrial ambitions, Africa's critical minerals have become strategically central to the global energy transition. The continent supplies essential inputs for electric vehicle batteries, semiconductors, and other clean technologies—resources that are increasingly sought by both Northern economies and emerging powers of the Global South. This intensifying demand underscores Africa's pivotal role in global clean technology value chains, not merely as a supplier of raw materials but as a potential co-architect of sustainable industrial futures. Within the context of the South African G20 presidency, these dynamics present a strategic opportunity to advance a common African position on critical minerals governance and value addition, linking the continent's developmental priorities with global decarbonisation efforts.

## **7. Discussion**

As has been noted, cooperation between South Africa and Brazil during South Africa's G20 presidency in 2025 presents a significant opportunity not only as a result of their consecutive G20 presidencies, but also in light of Brazil's hosting of COP30. Brazil and South Africa differ in certain important ways: tropical rain forests are not a diplomatic priority for South Africa to the extent that it is for Brazil, while South Africa's high reliance on coal-fired power generation is very different from Brazil's

hydroelectric and biofuel-centred economy. Nevertheless, their similarities and common interests far outweigh their differences:

- Both Brazil and South Africa are regional powers and significant global diplomatic actors, particularly as leading voices of the Global South;
- they share membership in G20, but also BRICS and IBSA (the bloc consisting of India, Brazil and South Africa);
- both countries face significant challenges related to inequality, development and economic growth, which informs their emphasis on justice and inclusion both locally and internationally;
- both countries are highly reliant on trade and are relatively distant from major global economic centres; and both countries have long engaged in seeking a fairer and more inclusive global governance system and international financial architecture.

South Africa has already committed to work closely with Brazil in the lead up to COP30 and the troika leadership structure of the G20 provides an important mechanism to support such engagement. At the time of writing the G20 working groups and task forces under the South African presidency have convened at least their first meeting and country negotiating positions are becoming clearer. There are three overriding questions that should inform Brazil and South Africa's engagement on climate and energy transition through the G20 in 2025:

1. How can Brazil and South Africa work together to support ambitious outcome for the South African G20 presidency?
2. How can South Africa's G20 presidency be leveraged to support strong outcomes for COP30? (linked to this, what early signs do negotiations within the G20 provide for potential consensus or sticking points within UNFCCC negotiations?)
3. How can the climate and energy agenda under the South African G20 presidency be used as a springboard to ensure continuity beyond 2025, both within the G20 and beyond it, particularly in the context of the US G20 presidency in 2026?

Within this framework, there are clear thematic areas of joint interest. Financing looms large, including financing for adaptation and just energy transitions. In this regard, the work being done on the cost of capital and international financial architecture reform must be continued, as climate financing must be considered within a broader context of financial and institutional power structures. A broad focus on inclusivity and addressing disproportionate impacts of climate change and energy transitions on vulnerable sectors of society, including women and youth, together with a shared ambition to elevate the role of Global South within international governance systems, is a further area of shared action. Trade, admittedly a sensitive topic in 2025 and dominated by tensions around tariffs, remains a critical area for both South Africa and Brazil. In this regard, both countries have an interest in supporting a trade system that does not discriminate against the southern countries (through, for example, unilateral climate-related trade measures). At the same time, however, such a trade system must provide space for the southern countries to mobilize trade and industrial policy to advance their position within global value chains, including critical mineral and clean technology value chains.

### **8. Conclusion and Recommendations**

South Africa's G20 presidency plays out during a year marked by significant global tensions and historic shifts within the global multilateral system. States are drawn into a narrow focus on immediate diplomatic goals, whether in addressing international conflicts, negotiating trade deals or reassessing alliances. It is, by any measure, a difficult year to achieve ambitious outcomes in a deliberative multilateral process such as the G20 or, indeed, the UNFCCC climate negotiations. Yet the fluidity in the international system, the questioning of assumptions that have guided past action, and the reassessment of values and interests at national and regional levels, also creates opportunities. Middle powers rarely have the leverage to unilaterally drive through their priorities within the international system; they must rely on diplomatic adroitness, a keen sense of timing and

strategic alliances to achieve their ends. Both Brazil and South Africa are well positioned in this regard and have a strong foundation on which to deepen their collaboration.

The following concrete recommendations are offered:

- Ensure that adaptation remains a priority on the G20 climate agenda, with a strong focus on financing for adaptation and resilience-building.
- Build on the work under the Brazilian G20 presidency on just and inclusive transitions, drawing on South Africa's extensive national and multilateral engagement in this area, to drive forward a programme of financing and technological support for just energy transitions.
- Strengthen G20 engagement on critical minerals, with a particular focus on value addition at source, deepening linkages between the G20 and the work of the UN Panel on Critical Energy Transition Minerals.
- Facilitate engagement with key African regional institutions and groups, including the Africa Group of Negotiators, to support synergies between South African national, African regional, and Brazilian objectives on the climate and energy agenda, focusing on insights from the G20 negotiations in support of ambitious outcomes at COP30.
- Engage with key partners in developing strategies to support the sustaining of the G20 climate and energy agenda beyond 2025, considering both continuity within G20 processes and how the G20 can be used as a springboard to institutionalise and consolidate initiatives beyond the G20 itself.

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