




# Introduction

## Voices from Brazil and South Africa in the G20: An introduction to the book


**Ana Garcia** 

*Social Sciences in Development, Agriculture, and Society (CPDA)*  
*Federal Rural University of Rio de Janeiro*   
*Rio de Janeiro, Brazil*

**Marta Fernández** 

*BRICS Policy Center, Institute of International Relations*  
*Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (PUC-Rio)*   
*Rio de Janeiro, Brazil*

**Siphamandla Zondi** 

*Institute for Pan-African Thought & Conversation*  
*University of Johannesburg*   
*Johannesburg, South Africa*<sup>1</sup>

The G20 was originally established as a response to the recurrent financial crises of the 1990s, culminating in the global financial crisis of 2008. At the time of its creation in 1999, the world was experiencing the era of neoliberal globalization, characterized by a broad consensus around market liberalization, free trade, and the unrestricted flow of capital—reflecting the global hegemony of the United States. In that context, economic policy coordination within the G20 took place among countries that were relatively aligned with U.S. interests—including, at the time, China and Russia, whose production and financial networks were integrated with the U.S. market.

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However, by the time the 2008 financial crisis erupted, the international landscape had changed significantly from that of 1999. The United States could no longer count on automatic alignment—whether economic or ideological—from other major powers. Until then, the G20 had functioned solely as a forum for finance ministers and central bank governors. It was precisely the 2008 crisis—distinct from previous ones for occurring at the very epicenter of global capitalism, the United States—that elevated the G20 to the level of a Leaders’ Summit (Ramos and Garcia 2024). This period was also marked by China’s rise as an economic power and by the political emergence of the BRICS grouping. The crisis reignited debates on global hegemony, raising questions about a possible decline in U.S. hegemony and the emergence of a new hegemonic cycle centered on China.

The G20 functions as a forum for economic and political cooperation that, despite its informal nature, has considerable representational and practical significance. Today, it is one of the few multilateral platforms capable of shaping major international public policies and agenda-setting initiatives. Despite the broadened agenda, the reform of the financial global architecture remains a fundamental pillar that serves as a catalyst for broader changes in global governance. It is essential for mobilizing resources and address climate change, hunger, and inequality, which priorities to the Brazilian and South African G20 presidencies.

The current context is unique as the G20 presidency has been held by countries from the Global South in succession since 2022. Indonesia led it in 2022, followed by India in 2023, Brazil in 2024, and South Africa in 2025. This sequence is particularly significant because each presidency sets thematic priorities that influence both the continuity and evolution of the G20’s agenda while shaping its institutional and logistical structures.

### **G20 Presidencies in Brazil (2024) and South Africa (2025)**

Brazil hosted the G20 in 2024 amid a context marked by geopolitical tensions, wars, social and climate challenges.

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Following the change in government in 2022, there were high expectations for Brazil's return to an active international role under Lula da Silva, especially on issues such as the environment and social inclusion. Responding to these expectations, the government announced the presidency's motto: "Building a Just World and a Sustainable Planet," with three key priorities: combating hunger, poverty, and inequality; addressing the three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social, and environmental); and reforming global governance (Brazil, 2024).

One of the defining features of Brazil's presidency was the thematic expansion of the agenda. The Sherpa track coordinated 15 working groups covering a wide range of issues: agriculture, anti-corruption, trade and investment, culture, development, digital economy, education, women's empowerment, research and innovation, environmental and climate sustainability, employment, energy transition, disaster risk reduction, health, and tourism. In addition to these working groups, the Brazilian presidency created two cross-cutting task forces: the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty and the Global Mobilization Against Climate Change, which involved different sectors of government and society. Among all these subjects, the energy transition stood out, reflecting the priorities of major powers such as China, the United States, and the European Union. However, the sheer number of topics and actors led to dispersion and a relative loss of focus, making it difficult to build consensus among the 21 members.

In the Finance track—the G20's original core—the work proceeded across seven technical groups: financial sector, international financial architecture, global economy, sustainable finance, financial inclusion, infrastructure, and international taxation. Three task forces complemented this track: the two mentioned above and the Finance and Health Task Force, created in 2021 during the Covid-19 pandemic.

One of the most notable outcomes of Brazil's G20 presidency was the proposal, within the Finance Track, for an international norm on taxing individuals with ultra-high net

wealth or the “super-rich”. Based on a study commissioned by the Brazilian government (Zucman, 2024), the proposal recommends an annual tax of at least 2% on individuals with net wealth exceeding US\$1 billion, with flexibility for each country in its implementation. The estimated global revenue from this measure ranges between US\$200 and US\$250 billion per year, with the funds earmarked for public services and addressing the climate crisis.

The G20 Leaders’ Declaration stated that member countries will engage in cooperative efforts to “ensure that ultra-high-net-worth individuals will be effectively taxed” (G20, 2024). It also reaffirmed the need for broad international consensus and greater coordination across existing forums, while signaling support for the development of the United Nations Framework Convention on International Tax Cooperation (UNFCITC) and its associated protocol at the UN (G20, 2024). In this sense, the recognition of these two agendas—the taxation of the super-rich and the advancement of the Framework Convention—can be considered a diplomatic victory for Brazil and other countries of the South. It is worth noting that both agendas were also included in the BRICS Leaders’ Declaration at the Kazan Summit in Russia (BRICS, 2024), indicating that Brazil is likely to continue advancing these negotiations during its BRICS presidency in 2025.

Another milestone of Brazil’s presidency was the creation of the Social G20, the first official initiative to formally include civil society in the group’s processes. Drawing on its tradition of social participation in international forums, such as the World Social Forum, Brazil invited national and international organizations to participate in parallel activities and engage with the official G20 agenda. The Social G20 Summit took place in the days leading up to the official Leaders’ Summit in November 2024 and gathered around fifty thousand people (Agencia Brasil, 2024).

At the beginning of 2024, there were uncertainties regarding the format and effectiveness of this new space. In interviews for the *“Guide for Understanding the G20”* (Garcia and

Fernandez, 2024), civil society representatives expressed doubts about its real capacity for influence. Yet, there was a widespread enthusiasm expressed in a high number of registrations for the Civil20 (C20), growing participation in Finance and Sherpa track events, and the organization of an autonomous space—the “People’s Summit Facing the G20”—where topics such as a ceasefire in Gaza were central (Deister, 2024).

Another important development was the “Dialogue of Convergences,” a process that brought together the Think20 (T20) and the Civil20 (C20) to produce joint recommendations for the G20 in three areas: economy and finance, environment and climate, and inclusion and digital transformation. The resulting declarations were delivered to official negotiators and to the Social G20, setting a precedent for future presidencies (BRICS Policy Center, 2024).

## **The South African Presidency of the G20**

South Africa’s presidency of the G20 in 2025, under the theme –solidarity, equality and sustainability– focuses on leveraging the forum to drive inclusive growth and sustainable development, with a particular emphasis on advancing the interests of the Global South and the African continent. South Africa is committed to building upon the work of previous presidencies (The Presidency, Republic of South Africa, 2024). This framework explicitly aims to bridge global divides by prioritizing equitable access to the opportunities presented by the digital economy and the green transition. A core objective is reforming the international financial architecture to better support countries of the South, including enhancing Multilateral Development Bank (MDB) capacity and exploring innovative financing mechanisms for sustainable infrastructure and climate resilience, recognizing Africa’s significant infrastructure deficit (OECD, 2024). Championing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) as an engine for intra-African trade and continental integration is another key pillar, positioning Africa as a dynamic partner in the global economy rather than solely a recipient of aid (DIRCO, 2024).

Concretely, the presidency focuses on operationalizing climate justice through initiatives like advancing Just Energy Transition Partnerships (JETPs) beyond South Africa, ensuring the shift to low-carbon economies is fair and creates sustainable livelihoods (National Treasury, RSA, 2024). Addressing the digital divide is critical, with efforts aimed at building digital infrastructure, enhancing digital literacy, and fostering inclusive digital governance frameworks – often encapsulated in the “Johannesburg Principles” proposed during the Digital Economy Working Group (G20 South Africa, 2025). Furthermore, South Africa strongly advocates for increased climate finance flows from countries of the North to countries of the South to meet adaptation and mitigation needs, alongside pushing for solutions to the debt distress faced by many low- and middle-income countries, arguing for mechanisms that free up fiscal space for development spending (UNCTAD, 2024). Ultimately, the presidency seeks to ensure that the benefits of global cooperation, technological advancement, and climate action are shared equitably, placing the needs and agency of the South firmly on the G20 agenda.

### **About this Book**

This book examines key issues and priorities of the G20 from the perspective of the countries of the Global South, with a particular focus on the Brazilian and South African presidencies in 2024 and 2025. It aims to identify key agendas and policy propositions that consider the specific realities of countries of the South. By identifying points of convergence and divergence between Brazilian and South African agendas, the book explores how these countries have sought to shape global discussions and contribute to solutions to pressing global challenges from a Global South perspective. In doing so, it seeks to fill an essential gap in the prioritization of issues and representation of voices from the Global South within the G20.

This book emerges from the work of various academic and research institutions in Think20 (T20), the G20 think tank engagement group. The successive leadership of emerging economies since Indonesia 2022 has provided an expanded

platform for think tanks, universities and research institutes from different regions to engage in discussions that are more closely aligned with the priorities of countries in the Global South. As a result, it has strengthened the representation of institutions from the Global South and facilitated the formal articulation of priority agendas and perspectives through a collective, structured approach.

Methodologically, this book identifies the priorities and agendas of the Brazilian and South African G20 presidencies – Inclusive Digital Transformation; Trade and Investment; Climate Action and Just Energy Transition; Reform of the International Financial Architecture for Sustainable Development; and Global Governance and Solidarity: Addressing Inequalities, Poverty, and Hunger – and analyzes policy ideas in relation to whether they advance the Global South perspective. It presents responses from scholars actively involved in the G20 processes in Brazil and South Africa, offering insights based on academic research and policy expertise.

## Chapters Outline

The first part on *Inclusive Digital Transformation* outlines the importance of digital transformation in fostering sustainable economic growth and creating a more equitable society through a progressive redistribution of resources. It highlights the need for digital inclusion and connectivity as essential components of this transformation, enhancing public services, particularly in health and education and necessitating the development of ethical and transparent regulatory frameworks for emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, to ensure their benefits are distributed equitably. Chapter One, on *Data Governance for Inclusive Development and Decent Work* advocates for inclusive policies to ensure digital transformation promotes decent work and well-being, particularly in the Global South. It highlights the need for effective frameworks to promote fairness, address online inequalities, and foster international cooperation. Emphasising governance and data regulation, this chapter suggests G20 initiatives such as the Global Digital Compact and ILO guidelines to advance digital labour rights and

ensure equitable outcomes amid uneven digital development. Chapter Two, *From G20 Brazil 2024 to G20 South Africa 2025: Unpacking the Digital Economy Themes - Comparisons and (dis)continuities*, examines the evolution and impact of Digital Economy themes within the G20, focusing on the transition from Brazil's presidency in 2024 to South Africa's in 2025 in a context of global geopolitical challenges. It outlines the significant role of the G20 in setting an agenda that incorporates the Global South, emphasizing the inclusion of the African Union and the expectation to advance the African Development agenda. The major themes discussed in the chapter include digital access, equality, AI innovation, and the need for robust regulation to mitigate societal harms.

Trade and Investment continue to grow in importance in an evolving international geopolitical landscape marked by increasing multipolarity and potential conflicts. The second part highlights the role of *Trade and Investment* as key drivers for global growth, development, and inclusive prosperity, while acknowledging the challenges posed by trade barriers, food insecurity, digitalization and the need to integrate micro, small, and medium enterprises. *Brazil, South Africa and the G20 Agenda - The Challenge of Trade and Investment* (Chapter Three) analyses the challenges and dynamics Brazil and South Africa face within the G20 concerning trade and investment, especially under the influence of geopolitical tensions. It discusses the strategic and normative convergence between Brazil and South Africa in their G20 presidencies, focusing on their roles in promoting a rules-based international trade and investment order. After evaluating the G20's effectiveness in trade and investment, and the global scenario marked by the WTO's uncertain future, its authors make recommendations for the G20 to focus on digital services, supply chain security, and reforming the WTO to ensure it remains a relevant custodian of global trade and investment rules. Chapter Four, *Trade and Investment in a Shifting Global Landscape: The G20's Role in Promoting Sustainable Development in Africa*, highlights Africa's dependency on extractive industries and trade inequalities, emphasizing the need for structural transformation, diversification, and infrastructure development.

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It advocates leveraging the G20 platform, under South Africa's presidency, to reform global trade rules, regulate foreign direct investment for development, and curb illicit financial flows. Emphasizing critical minerals and regional trade, the chapter urges Africa to shift from commodity exports to value-added industries. Also, Chapter Five on *The South's approach: trade in the G20 Agenda* examines the evolution of the G20 international trade, particularly how rising protectionism impacts developing countries. The chapter compares the G20 declarations and surveys from Brazil, India, South Africa and Germany, showing broad opposition to protectionism but diverging trade preferences between developing and developed nations, highlighting tensions between multilateral rhetoric and trade practices.

The third part, *Accelerating Climate Action and Just Energy Transition through the G20*, highlights the urgency of implementing effective climate action and ensuring equitable transitions in energy production and consumption. Additionally, Chapter Six presents the G20's climate and energy agenda on Brazil and South Africa's presidencies and the shared paths, interests and objectives regarding the strengthening of multilateral climate diplomacy. It highlights the critical need for adaptation, resilience-building and just energy transitions, especially in developing countries, highlighting the significant impact of G20 countries on global carbon emissions and climate finance. This chapter also explores the alignment of the G20 agenda with Africa's priorities, emphasising the unjust burden of climate change on Africa despite its minimal contribution to global emissions. Its author recommends prioritising adaptation, building just and inclusive transitions, strengthening critical minerals, supporting African climate goals and sustaining the climate and energy agenda beyond 2025. Chapter Seven, *Opportunities and Challenges for Promoting Sustainable and Inclusive Infrastructure in the Amazon Basin*, highlights how the Amazon infrastructure projects favor private economic interests, causing deforestation, biodiversity loss, and social conflicts with limited benefit to local communities. It advocates for protecting forests and rivers while improving infrastructure through education,

sanitation, energy and internet. Additionally, it emphasizes climate resilience and lessons for G20 countries to balance growth, equity and sustainability. Chapter Eight on *The IMF's Resilience and Sustainability Facility as a framework for promoting market-based solutions to decarbonization* examines the Resilience and Sustainability Facility of the IMF to explore the shift from the traditional mandate to a more environmentally aligned practice. By conducting an in-depth analysis of RST reform measures and agreements, demonstrates how the Fund makes a worthwhile innovation that still deserves amelioration with clear recommendations.

The urgency to *Reforming the International Financial Architecture for Sustainable Development* is central to address financial instability, development challenges, and the marginalization of the Global South. Chapter Nine, *Achievements and Limits in Reforming the International Financial Architecture: A Critical Assessment of Brazil's G20 Presidency* revisits the G20's historical role and evolution as a financial crisis management non-official forum to bring into context the G20 Brazil discussions within the Reform of the International Financial Architecture topic. The chapter gives a panoramic but thorough view of the proposals and contributions to the specific agendas of reform, comprising the tax architecture, MDB's reform, and debt, and shares an overview of specific recommendations made within the T20 Brazil process. Chapter Ten critically examines the gap between the G20 commitments to gender and equality and women's financial exclusion in Brazil and South Africa. Employing the decolonial perspective to highlight structural barriers to women's economic empowerment, and examples from Brazil's Banco Palmas and South Africa's Women's Economic Assembly, the chapter outlines transformative strategies for leveraging microfinance and SMME support to achieve collective economic sovereignty for women. Chapter Eleven argues that the G20 must lead multilateral development banks toward expanded lending capacity, improved governance, and enhanced access to global challenge funds. Given inadequate current commitments, necessary reforms include establishing dedicated windows for global challenges with equitable

governance structures. The authors emphasize simplifying financial architectures and creating appropriate incentives, while advocating for country-based platforms in the countries of the South to address climate, pandemics, biodiversity, and food security through more effective global responses.

The concluding part, *Global Governance and Solidarity: Addressing Inequalities, Poverty, and Food Security*, highlights the necessity of reforming the multilateral governance system to effectively tackle interconnected global challenges like inequality, poverty, and food security. Chapter Twelve on *The Politics of Defending Inequality: Hate Speech, Visibility, and Symbolic Containment* discusses ways in which inequality is actively defended through moral, discursive, and symbolic practices. It analyzes the backlash triggered by redistributive proposals, such as wealth taxation, exemplified by the campaign “Tax the Super-Rich for the Right to the City,” launched during Brazil’s G20 presidency. The authors demonstrate how reactions are rooted in narratives that legitimize privilege and devalue marginalized groups, using digital platforms to discredit advocates. The campaign’s example highlights that the legitimacy of redistribution is not only a policy issue but also a struggle over communication and symbolic representation. Chapter Thirteen, *The International Financial System Through Intersectional Lenses: The Ethics of Care as a Global Alternative* analyses the international financial system through an intersectional lens, demonstrating how austerity, debt, and tax regimes deepen inequalities of gender, race, and class. The chapter highlights how racialised women from the Global South suffer an increased burden of care, precariousness, and debt. It criticises the financialization of care and proposes a care ethics as an economic alternative centred on life. The chapter advocates for fiscal reforms, debt relief, universal public policies and paths to a just and sustainable economy. *The G20 and the need to reform the UN System*, Chapter Fourteen, suggests that the G20 can improve global governance by addressing legitimacy and efficiency issues in the UN system. This is achieved through integrating institutions, forming a UN Reform task Force within the G20, adopting a three-country presidency, and engaging more with

Global South organisations. Priority areas are UNSC reform, ECOSOC collaboration, and fostering consensus to strengthen multilateralism and enhance global governance. The Chapter Fifteen on the *G20 and Accelerated Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals: An Accountability Framework* analyses the evolution and impact of the G20's Accountability Framework on the accelerated implementation of the SDGs. It outlines the inception of the G20 Development Working Group in 2010. It traces significant reforms to the framework, such as structured reporting and peer review processes aimed at improving transparency and policy consistency. Despite the progress, the chapter highlights persisting challenges such as enforcement and data quality, suggesting strategic proposals to enhance accountability measures. The authors recommend the need for continued refinement of the framework to ensure effective tackling of global issues. Chapter Sixteen on *Multilateralism: Its Objects, and Implications for Africa in an Evolving Global Order* addresses the challenges and opportunities encountered by multilateralism in the face of global transition and the urgent need for reforms in global governance. It highlights the UN-centric approach towards a more inclusive G20 framework that acknowledges the need for global governance reforms to better represent the geopolitical realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, including the voices of the Global South and Africa. The chapter encompasses the urgent call for reforms across various sectors, including financial systems, security frameworks, and digital transitions, to address global challenges like climate change, development finance, and equitable global governance. It emphasizes the importance of strengthening multilateralism through inclusivity, accountability, and solidarity, aiming for a just and equitable global order that aligns with Africa's aspirations and the broader Global South. The closing chapter seventeen, *Morbid Symptoms in the Time of Monsters*, explores how the G20's approach exacerbates global polycrises through the interconnected nexus of climate change, inequality, and unsustainable development patterns. Despite progressive leadership from Brazil and South Africa's presidencies emphasizing solidarity and sustainability, the analysis reveals a significant disconnect between rhetorical flourish and

meaningful transformative praxis. The research highlights demand from African and South American civil societies for climate reparations, just transitions, and localized solutions that reject global North impositions. The chapter advocates for comprehensive systemic reforms using transformative and equitable strategies to prevent imminent ecological and social collapse.

## **Conclusion**

This book offers a comprehensive examination of the G20's evolving role in global governance, based on the contributions and perspectives from the Global South, specifically during the Brazilian and South African presidencies. Through an in-depth analysis of key issues such as inclusive digital transformation, trade and investment, climate action, the reform of international financial architecture, and the reform of global governance to address inequalities, the authors emphasize the significance of addressing global challenges through multilateral cooperation and the inclusion of the voices of the Global South. By highlighting the strategic priorities set by Brazil and South Africa, the book sheds light on the potential of the G20 presidencies to influence global policy agendas from a Global South perspective, seeking to foster a more inclusive and equitable global order.

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