



G20 Empower Alliance 2025 – South African Presidency Recommendations Theme: *UHURU – Women Building Sustainable Income and Financial Independence*

1. Introduction

Under the 2025 Presidency of the Republic of South Africa, the G20 Empower Alliance convenes with renewed commitment to advancing women's economic empowerment through the theme *UHURU* — symbolising *freedom: Women Building Sustainable Income and Financial Independence*. This theme captures our collective ambition: to foster sustainable income and financial independence, and economic development for women globally.

Building on the legacies of Italy (2021), Indonesia (2022), and India (2023), the South African Presidency brings forth a bold and transformative African perspective. We affirm the essential role of women not as passive beneficiaries but as active architects of economic development, particularly within the private sector. We recommit to addressing structural barriers, closing systemic gaps, and accelerating the development of inclusive, gender-equitable economies.

2. Priority Pillars and Strategic Recommendations to G20 Sherpas

A. Advancing Women's Leadership

Despite progress, women remain under-represented in senior corporate leadership across G20 economies and beyond. On average, women hold 23% of board seats and 12% of CFO roles across G20 markets, with similarly low representation in CEO and chair positions. National patterns vary, for example, in South Africa, women occupy 36% of board seats but only 23% of executive management roles, despite constituting nearly 46% of the economically active population on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange. These gaps constrain economic performance, inclusive growth and the achievement of SDG 5.

Recommendations:

G20 Leaders commit to accelerate women's leadership in the private sector by adopting a coordinated package of targets, regulatory reforms, incentives, and capacity investments to increase women's representation in boards and executive leadership, improve transparency, and remove structural barriers to advancement.

- Targets and time-bound ambition: G20 members to consider adopting either legislated or official aspirational targets of 30–40% representation for women on corporate boards and senior executive

teams, adaptable to national contexts. Where targets are aspirational, require corporate plans to show 15 percentage-point cumulative increase every 3 years (or equivalent annualized step) until the target range is reached. Targets should be gender-and intersectionality-sensitive (race/ethnicity, disability, migrant status)

- **Mandatory disclosure & regulatory alignment:** Integrate standardised gender diversity metrics into securities regulators/stock exchange listing rules and national ESG reporting frameworks. Core metrics should include share of women on boards, in leadership positions (CEO, CFO, executive team), a management-level pipeline breakdown, and gender pay/transparency data.
- **Incentives for compliance & positive reinforcement:** Use fiscal and procurement levers to accelerate adoption: preferential procurement scoring for supplier firms meeting gender-leadership thresholds, access to targeted tax credits or accelerated deductions for companies that demonstrably progress on leadership parity, and development of sustainability-linked financial instruments that tie financing terms to verified gender diversity KPIs. (Rationale: combines ‘carrots’ with market signal.)
- **Building pipelines & sector focus:** Co-fund national and sectoral leadership pipelines, with priority support for under-represented sectors (e.g., mining, infrastructure, finance, deep tech). Measures include executive sponsorship programmes, paid leadership internships, remit for gender-balanced succession planning, and targeted return-to-work and flexible work policies to retain mid-career female talent.

B. Scaling Women-Owned Enterprises and Inclusive Procurement

Women-led businesses comprise over 30% of formal enterprises but face a global credit gap exceeding USD 1.5 trillion. Women entrepreneurs continue to face significant barriers to accessing finance and market opportunities. Globally, less than 1% of corporate procurement and 5% of public procurement spend is directed to women-owned enterprises, despite evidence that women-led businesses are key drivers of innovation, employment, and community resilience

Recommendations:

G20 members are encouraged to adopt a Private Sector Gender-Responsive Procurement and Financing Compact to accelerate financial inclusion and market participation for women entrepreneurs. The Compact should include the following actions:

- Consider the adoption the *We-Fi Private Sector Codes* across G20 economies to harmonise inclusive procurement practices in the private sector, supported by the financial sector to promote responsive gender lens investing.
- G20 members are encouraged to adopt a Private Sector Gender-Responsive Procurement and Financing Compact to accelerate financial inclusion and market participation for women entrepreneurs.
- Institutionalize supplier diversity policies: Integrate gender-responsive procurement frameworks across private sector supply chains, with standardised criteria for identifying, verifying, and reporting on women-owned businesses.
- Expand access to finance linked to procurement contracts: Establish blended finance mechanisms, credit guarantee schemes, and invoice financing solutions that enable women-owned SMEs to access affordable capital once they secure procurement opportunities.

- Invest in capacity-building and supplier readiness: Partner with development agencies and chambers of commerce to build technical capacity, digital readiness, and compliance capabilities among women entrepreneurs to meet corporate procurement standards.
- Mandate transparency and accountability: Embed supplier diversity metrics and gender procurement reporting within corporate sustainability and ESG frameworks, incentivized through disclosure standards, investor ratings, and public recognition.

C. Promoting Digital Innovation and STEAM Inclusion

Women remain underrepresented in digital and STEAM fields globally, occupying less than 30% of research and innovation roles and founding less than 15% of tech start-ups. At the same time, trillions of dollars in economic value are locked in research that never reaches commercial application. Bridging this gap presents an opportunity to drive both gender equality and innovation-led economic growth.

Enabling women to transition from researchers and technologists to innovators, founders, and investors is critical to inclusive growth. A gender-responsive approach to the commercialisation of research supported by access to finance, mentorship, and market linkages can unleash new industries, create quality jobs, and expand digital inclusion.

Recommendations:

G20 members should establish a Global Framework for Women's Digital and STEAM Commercialisation to strengthen women's participation across the innovation value chain. The Framework should prioritize the following actions:

- Invest in gender-responsive innovation ecosystems: Support incubators, accelerators, and technology parks that specifically focus on women researchers, inventors, and technologists, linking them to investors, industry partners, and commercialization opportunities.
- Facilitate research-to-market pathways: Develop structured commercialization programs within universities and research institutions to convert women-led research outputs into scalable products, services, and intellectual property. Incentivize partnerships between academia, private sector, and government for technology transfer and applied innovation.
- Enable access to finance and intellectual property protection: Expand access to venture capital, blended finance, and innovation grants for women-led tech and STEAM enterprises. Strengthen IP awareness and support mechanisms to help women protect and monetize their innovations.
- Embed digital and STEAM inclusion in education systems: Integrate gender-responsive curricula, mentorship, and early exposure to coding, robotics, AI, and digital entrepreneurship across education levels to build long-term talent pipelines.

- Promote global collaboration and visibility: Create a G20 Women in Innovation Network to connect women innovators globally, share best practices, and showcase successful commercialization case studies through an annual Innovation & Research Commercialisation Forum.

6. Conclusion and Call to Action

This moment marks a historic milestone the first G20 Empower Alliance hosted on African soil, infused with the perspectives, priorities, and power of African women. Through the banner of *UHURU: Women building sustainable income and financial independence*, we call upon all G20 members to champion a world where:

- Endorse and disseminate the G20 EMPOWER Best Practices Playbook and the EMPOWER KPI Dashboard as the operational toolkit for companies and regulators; encourage member states to adapt and scale high-impact programs nationally and regionally.

- Publish an annual, comparable G20 Women's Leadership Scorecard (coordinated by the Empowerment of Women Working Group / G20 EMPOWER secretariat) tracking: % women on boards, % women in executive management, % of listed firms with published gender targets, gender pay gap disclosure rate, and % of procurement spends directed to women-led firms. (Use EMPOWER KPI methodology as baseline.)