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Africa's B20
crossroads 

Africa's economic reckoning

The world has long spoken of the continent's potential. **Mxolisi Mgojo** argues that Africa cannot afford to squander the opportunity the B20 presents

● Africa stands at a crossroads. The world speaks of our continent's "potential" as if it were a birthright rather than a prize to be seized. Yet potential alone does not power economies, create jobs or transform societies. What Africa needs now is not more platitudes, but pragmatic partnerships between governments, businesses and communities that convert ambition into action.

The stakes could not be higher. By 2050, one in four workers globally will be African. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) offers a \$3.4-trillion opportunity. But without urgent collaboration, these advantages risk becoming mere statistics in another missed decade. The question is no longer whether Africa can lead, but whether we will act decisively to claim our place in the global economy.

Africa's B20 presidency must shift the narrative

This year, South Africa's leadership of the B20 is more than symbolic, it is a strategic repositioning. Africa cannot afford to be a passive participant in global economic discussions. We have an opportunity to shape actionable policy recommendations for global impact.

Since taking the B20 co-chair, South Africa has mobilised over 1,000 business leaders from G20 nations and launched eight task forces addressing key issues such as trade, energy, digital transformation and governance.



The timing is critical. Rising protectionism, fractured supply chains and sluggish global growth threaten progress. Yet history shows that Africa's greatest leaps forward have come during periods of adversity. An African B20 provides a platform to turn our challenges into catalysts for innovation.

Bridging business and policy for real-world impact

The B20 is often called the "voice of business" to the G20. In truth, it is something far more consequential: a bridge between private-sector dynamism and public sector policy. Theoretical growth models mean little without execution. Our task forces are designed to ensure recommendations translate into tangible outcomes.

Consider the trade and investment task force, which is working to make the AfCFTA operational, not just a paper agreement. Or the energy transition task force, balancing sustainability with energy security for communities still in the dark. The digital transformation and employment & education task forces are equipping Africa's youth – the world's youngest population – for the jobs of the future.



Mxolisi Mgojo

Lessons from India's digital leap

India's 2023 B20 presidency offers a blueprint for impact. Its focus on digital public infrastructure, particularly the Aadhaar biometric system and Unified Payments Interface, revolutionised access to finance and services for 1.3 billion people. Street vendors now transact digitally and the informal economy is being formalised at scale.

For Africa, the lesson is clear. With the right policies, we can leapfrog outdated systems. India proved that B20 recommendations can drive systemic change. Africa must apply this model to our unique challenges, from cross-border trade to skills development.

AfCFTA demands more than aspiration

The AfCFTA is the world's largest free trade zone by membership, with the potential to boost intra-African trade by 52%. Yet without physical infrastructure, digital connectivity and skills development, it risks becoming another unfulfilled promise. Trade corridors remain clogged by bureaucracy, poor logistics and outdated borders.

The urgency is economic survival. By 2050, half of Africa's workforce may lack formal employment if current trends persist.

The AfCFTA can be the engine that changes this trajectory, creating seamless markets and elevating Africa's role in global value chains.

Turning task forces into action

B20 South Africa's eight task forces operate like an orchestra: each has a distinct role, but the real power lies in harmony. The finance and infrastructure task force is crafting long-term investment mechanisms, while the integrity and compliance task force ensures governance frameworks are robust and transparent.

But recommendations are not enough. The true measure of success will be whether this African-led B20 influences G20 policies and, more importantly, whether those policies translate into jobs, investment and inclusive growth.

Africa's moment is here, but it will not last indefinitely. Global partnerships must move beyond rhetoric to deliver concrete investments, policy reforms and scalable solutions. The B20 provides a platform, but the responsibility lies with all stakeholders: businesses must invest boldly, governments must reform relentlessly and civil society must hold both accountable.

The world has long spoken of Africa's potential. It's time to replace potential with progress.

Mgojo is co-chair, B20 South Africa

