

# Business pushes G20 to prioritise children, women

• B20 employment and education task force urges focus on early childhood development

By JANA MARX *Economics Correspondent*

The B20 employment and education task force is calling on G20 governments to equip young people with practical, in-demand skills that will be crucial for future economies.

The task force emphasised that the focus must be on real employment outcomes, not just paper qualifications. It is urging countries to commit 0.5% of GDP to lifelong learning and to adopt a youth employment compact based on real demand and practical platforms, such as SA's SAYouth.mobi.

"[This] is a platform that essentially provides real-time data to young people who don't have access to employment, education or training," Shadi Chauke, Sanlam's group executive of corporate affairs and sustainability, said on Thursday. Chauke is also the deputy chair of the employment and education task force.

She spoke to Business Day at the Business 20 (B20) – the official forum where the global business community feeds its policy priorities into the G20 process. "Employers ... upload vacancies, upload their skills needs, and that information is available in real time," she said.

The platform also helps policymakers align education with market demand. This model could be replicated across G20 countries.

Thursday's handover event marked the formal submission of all the task forces' recommendations to the G20. For SA, which holds the G20 presidency, it is also about ensuring that African priorities are reflected in the global agenda.

The employment and education task force is one of eight that developed recommendations on jobs and skills, energy and climate, trade, finance and digitalisation.



The B20 is the official forum where the global business community feeds its policy priorities into the G20 process. Jana Marx

The task force's other recommendations include expanding jobs through business-led growth, removing barriers to women's participation, shaping fair rules for the gig economy and investing in early childhood education (ECD).

Asked which skills the task force had identified as "in-demand", Chauke cited digital skills and those required for infrastructure, such as construction and engineering as examples. She also highlighted artisanal skills, typically offered by TVET colleges.

Chauke said increasing female labour force participation had to be a priority. From a regulatory standpoint, she said women should be empowered through entrepreneurship, including "providing incentives to finance institutions to provide finance to women, for access to finance for their entrepreneurial endeavours".

"There is still a very low penetration of women accessing finance," she said.

Regarding companies hiring women across different roles and levels, she suggested introducing targets for women's participation in the labour force, and holding business and the government to account for honouring targets.

She also made a strong case for ECD as an economic priority, not just a social one.

"There have been studies, even by the World Bank, that have demonstrated that when governments invest in ECD, even if it's \$1 – for every \$1 it will translate into a return on investment of between \$4 and \$13 for the economy over time," she said.

Children who have access to ECD in the first couple of years of their lives have a better shot at performing, are better at acquiring skills, and are more employable and able to access higher education later in life, she said.

At the official handover event, SA's B20 sherpa, Cas Coovadia, also emphasised the importance of youth and women's participation.

At November's G20 Summit, world leaders will decide whether, and how fully, to adopt the B20's business-led priorities into their final declaration. [marxj@businesslive.co.za](mailto:marxj@businesslive.co.za)