

Philanthropy and the G20: Strategic Insights from South Africa



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Why This Moment Matters

01

The G20 stands at a pivotal moment. As global challenges become increasingly interconnected—from climate change and economic inequality to health and digital inclusion—the need for systems-level collaboration has never been greater. Philanthropy offers a unique bridge between global ambition and local action, connecting communities, governments, and businesses through innovation and shared purpose.

In recent years, philanthropy has stepped into global policy spaces with renewed purpose. During India's 2023 G20 Presidency, foundations contributed to the Civil 20 (C20) and Think 20 (T20) engagement tracks, [offering policy input on women's leadership, climate resilience, and inclusive growth](#). These efforts helped translate community-level experiences into policy recommendations that shaped national dialogue.

Similarly, during the COVID-19 pandemic, philanthropy played a vital role in connecting urgent humanitarian

needs with long-term systems reform—from vaccine equity funds and public health infrastructure investments to mental health programs and digital access initiatives. These examples show how philanthropy's adaptability and systems perspective complement government and private sector efforts.

This moment calls for deeper recognition of philanthropy's role in shaping collective global action. Philanthropy brings the lived realities of communities into global decision-making—ensuring that the G20's outcomes are not only ambitious but achievable.

The insights from this brief are based on a series of interviews conducted by **WINGS** with 20 philanthropic entities, ranging from community to corporate, grassroots to international, that have strategically engaged with the G20 process throughout South Africa's presidency. While not an exhaustive list of philanthropy's activities, it provides a snapshot into entry points, both old and new.

Context: The G20 as a Platform for Collaboration

02

Philanthropy has a strategic opportunity to evolve from an “invited funder” to a co-creation partner within the G20 ecosystem. Amid a crisis of multilateralism and shifting geopolitics, the G20 remains one of the few global arenas where major powers such as the G7 and BRICS+ (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) still convene and

seek consensus on global issues. Representing around 85% of global GDP, 75% of international trade, and two-thirds of the world’s population, the G20 brings together governments, the African Union (AU), the European Union (EU), and a range of sectors and voices that shape global agenda-setting and policy advocacy.

Why the G20 Matters to Philanthropy

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Representing around 85% of global GDP, 75% of international trade, and two-thirds of the world’s population, the G20 provides a platform for governments, the African Union (AU), the European Union (EU), and a range of sectors to shape global priorities. For philanthropy, this is a unique opportunity to make its values, such as equity, climate action, democracy, and health — visible and credible in global policy conversations.

Some philanthropic actors have been engaging in the G20 process, and philanthropy has begun to gain recognition in G20 processes, from inclusion in Think 20 (T20) policy briefs under India’s presidency to the first-ever reference to philanthropy in the 2024 G20 Leaders’ Declaration under Brazil. Yet these milestones are only first steps. To build on them, the sector must coordinate and sustain engagement across presidencies — using the G20’s Troika mechanism to ensure continuity, and the engagement tracks as trusted spaces for collaboration with government and business.

It’s important to underscore that the G20 extends beyond intergovernmental negotiations; it serves as both a safe space and a strategic platform for building allyship,

advancing shared priorities, and navigating influence across varying political contexts. As such, G20 processes and outcomes can have a ripple effect domestically, lending philanthropy added legitimacy when advancing issues like social protection or climate finance at home. By amplifying diverse voices and bridging local and global agendas, philanthropy can strengthen multilateralism and ensure that national priorities find a seat at the global table.

The cost of inaction is high: without proactive engagement, philanthropy risks ceding influence to other actors and missing opportunities to align global commitments with local change.

The G20 process favours first-movers. Identifying entry points as they emerge, allocating designated capacity, and coordinating as a sector to ensure philanthropy’s contributions are strategic, sustainable, and impactful. Overlooking the G20 also forfeits the opportunity to link year-round policy advocacy to parallel multilateral spaces like UN Financing for Development (FfD4), UN General Assembly (UNGA), Conference of Parties (COP), and regional EU/AU convenings.

The G20 Ecosystem: Entry Points for Philanthropy

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The G20 is not only a government process — it is a year-long ecosystem of formal, informal, and outsider spaces where state and non-state actors engage, exchange, and influence. In South Africa alone, more than 140 official and unofficial meetings took place, reflecting the vibrancy and complexity of the process. For philanthropy, this landscape offers multiple entry points to shape priorities, broker partnerships, elevate local perspectives, and translate policy into tangible impact. [Please learn more about the G20 architecture here.](#)

The G20 operates through two official tracks: the **Finance Track** and the **Sherpa Track**. Under the Sherpa Track sit the formal *Engagement Groups*, which provide direct input into the government-led process: **Business 20 (B20)**, **Think 20 (T20)**, **Civil 20 (C20)**, **Science 20 (S20)**, **Women 20 (W20)**, **Youth 20 (Y20)**, **Labour 20 (L20)**, **Oceans 20 (O20)**, **Start-Up 20 (SU20)**, **Urban 20 (U20)**, **Parliaments 20 (P20)**, **Supreme Auditing Institutions 20 (SAI20)**, and **Justice 20 (J20)**.

Beyond these, there are *informal groupings* such as **Children 20 (Ch20)**, **Interfaith 20 (IF20)**, and **Africa CSO G20 (ACG20)**. These groups do not provide formal policy input but host their own events and initiatives throughout the year, allowing them to prioritise new or

marginalised issues that might not yet feature in the official agenda.

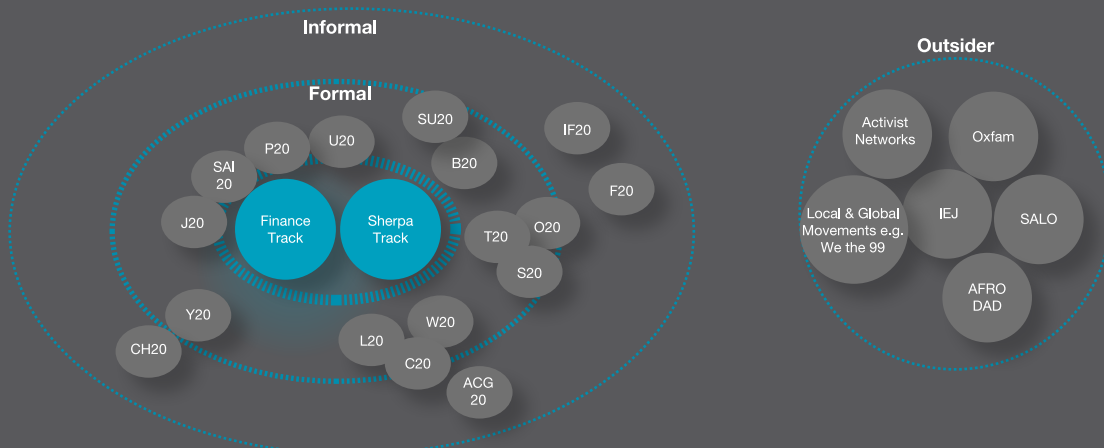
While outcome documents like communiqués and the Leaders' Declaration are the visible results of this process, the most meaningful impact often happens behind the scenes — in the relationships built, the coalitions formed, and the ideas tested through collaboration.

Philanthropy's Role within the Ecosystem.

Philanthropy, as a sector, has a strategic opportunity to evolve from an “invited funder” to a co-creation partner within this dynamic system. Understanding how these formal, informal, and outsider spaces interact allows the sector to engage more intentionally — aligning efforts, amplifying local agency, and extending influence beyond the G20 calendar.

During South Africa's presidency, **WINGS**, in partnership with the **Independent Philanthropy Association of South Africa (IPASA)**, the **Anglo American Foundation**, **F20**, and others, leveraged their networks to coordinate and strengthen philanthropy's collective voice. Together, they advocated for structured, formal spaces for philanthropy's participation within key engagement groups and across the G20 process — a step toward more sustained, systemic involvement.

Mapping the G20 ecosystem and engagement spaces.



Why Philanthropy Matters to the G20

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Philanthropy is uniquely positioned to help the G20 translate global commitments into grounded, lasting action. Unlike governments bound by electoral cycles or private actors guided by profit, philanthropy has the flexibility to take risks, the patience to invest in long-term systems change, and the reach to connect communities across borders.

Across G20 economies and beyond, philanthropic organizations are already advancing the very priorities the G20 seeks to achieve — from climate adaptation and inclusive growth to digital transformation and gender equality. By funding innovation, convening diverse actors, and supporting enabling environments, philanthropy acts as both **a catalyst and a connector** within the global policy ecosystem.

The G20 sets global agendas year-round. Engagement ensures that philanthropy is positioned as a credible and consistent global actor that allows for greater influence.

G20 tracks and engagement groups are also proven spaces for piloting and showcasing cross-sector collaborations, creating entry points for partnerships with public and private sector stakeholders.

Finally, the G20 Troika mechanism enables continuity beyond a single presidency. Countries co-create and influence the G20 agenda for up to three cycles, enabling multi-year advocacy strategies.

Philanthropy's comparative advantage lies not just in funding projects, but in **building systems** that endure. It fills critical coordination gaps, seeds innovation before markets or states can act, and ensures that the voices of civil society and marginalized groups inform global decision-making.

If the G20 seeks inclusive and sustainable outcomes, philanthropy must be recognized not as a peripheral partner, but as an essential driver of collective progress.

Why WINGS is Undertaking This Work

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Recognising the G20's growing influence in shaping global and national priorities, WINGS has been actively engaging in the G20 process since 2023 to ensure philanthropy has a voice at the table. As a global network of networks representing philanthropy's collective interests, WINGS is uniquely positioned to connect diverse actors — from community foundations to corporate funders — and help the sector engage more strategically in multilateral spaces.

Without a recognised “home” for philanthropy, actors struggle to find the right doorway. Local foundations often lack the policy bandwidth to track calendars and produce decision-ready inputs, while large internationals fill space by default without local anchors. The spike of activity around the G20 Summit, followed by weak follow-through, results in fatigue and cynicism among partners who do not see recommendations translate into work plans.

Over the past two years, WINGS has built a coordinated approach to philanthropy's participation in the G20, working with members and partners to educate, connect, and mobilise the field. This collaborative effort contributed to a major milestone in 2024: the first-ever mention of philanthropy in the G20 Leaders' Declaration and the creation of a Philanthropy Working Group within the Civil 20 (C20) process, co-chaired by GIFE, IIED, and WINGS.

Building on this momentum, WINGS and partners¹ established a transition task force to support philanthropy's engagement during South Africa's presidency. By producing this brief, WINGS aims to capture key insights and practical lessons from this evolving work — helping philanthropy identify entry points, influence agendas, and build stronger cross-sector partnerships that make giving more effective and impactful at both global and local levels.

¹ Including IPASA, SGS Consulting, Anglo American Foundation, African Youth IPASAm Philanthropy Network (AYPN), Centre on African Philanthropy and Social Investment (CAPSI), CivSource South Africa, Social Change Assistance Trust (SCAT), Southern Africa Philanthropy Foundation (SAPF) and Southern Africa Trust.

Pathways for Philanthropy's Engagement in the G20: Insights from the South African Presidency

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01 Philanthropy as Strategic Grantmakers – Amplifying Local Agency

Strategic grantmakers play a pivotal role in strengthening locally led strategies and collaboration, enabling greater contextual relevance, flexibility, and grassroots impact within global processes like the G20.

The **Mott Foundation**, which began engaging with the G20 during Brazil's presidency in 2024, was a key supporter of South African philanthropy and civil society during the 2025 cycle. Through the **African Climate Foundation (ACF)**, Mott helped raise ambition and accountability in reforming the international financial architecture for climate and development goals. It also backed civic actors such as **Oxfam South Africa** and the **Institute for Economic Justice (IEJ)** — directly and

via intermediaries—to ensure that economic justice and climate priorities remained central to G20 debates.

The **Ford Foundation**, which first engaged with the G20 during Indonesia's presidency in 2022, continued advancing equity and local agency in global governance. In 2025, Ford supported the **T20 Secretariat** through the **Institute for Pan-African Thought & Conversation**, while also enabling ACF's **New Economy Hub** to lead communications and advocacy on “Economy as Care” in partnership with Oxfam South Africa. Through ACF, Ford also supported the **Foundations 20 (F20)**, and contributed to dialogue spaces convened by **SALO**, connecting state, diplomatic, and grassroots networks.

As a regional anchor, the ACF was instrumental in empowering local actors through subgrants and technical support. Beginning preparations early in 2024, ACF appointed an expert from India's G20 presidency to advise on strategy alignment and strengthened the **South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA)** as the T20 Secretariat — [linking South Africa's G20 engagement to global expertise and networks](#).

In parallel, philanthropy also played a critical role in enabling **inclusive civic participation** through support to spaces like the **People's Summit ("We the 99")** — a

civil society-led platform that emerged as an open, grassroots alternative to formal engagement groups during South Africa's G20 presidency. The People's Summit convened community-based organisations and movements from across the Global South to mobilise around issues such as economic justice, debt reform, and climate accountability. This experience highlights how philanthropy can strengthen democratic participation by creating space for diverse voices — especially when official processes face challenges of access or legitimacy.

02 Philanthropy as Connector – Bringing Actors Together

Convening is central to the G20 process. Dialogue, coalition-building, and consensus emerge when diverse actors come together—and philanthropy has played a catalytic role in enabling these interactions across official and informal tracks.

During South Africa's G20 presidency, philanthropy supported convenings that helped set priorities and shape the agenda. The **ACF** backed both the **Sustainable Finance** and **Energy Transition Working Groups**, key minister-led forums advancing climate and development goals. **Investec**, a South African private bank, hosted the [Sherpa and Finance Deputies Meeting](#) to facilitate a smooth transition into the presidency and influence early discussions on sustainable infrastructure investment. It also hosted the **G20 Youth Entrepreneurs Alliance**, spotlighting local innovation and investment opportunities.

Through Investec's early leadership in leveraging its convening capabilities, its philanthropy division was able to use these platforms to expose the company's

beneficiary networks to key agenda-setting spaces and stakeholders, through the G20 process.

The **Anglo American Foundation** prioritised youth economic empowerment, providing [support to the Y20 Summit](#) and co-funding a [multi-stakeholder workshop series](#) with **ANDE** to inform youth-focused policy inputs for the Y20 and SU20 tracks. It also partnered with **WINGS** to host convenings and map philanthropy's role within the G20 ecosystem, strengthening the sector's coordination and fostering partnerships such as the business-philanthropy alliance within the B20. At the **2025 UN General Assembly**, WINGS co-hosted "[Philanthropy as a Catalyst in Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships for Sustainable Development](#)" alongside the Anglo American Foundation, Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, and the EU. The event featured the B20 Sherpa, Cas Coovadia, and reinforced philanthropy's ability to drive joint action with business and government to advance shared global priorities.

Philanthropy can strengthen democratic participation by creating space for diverse voices.

Even outside formal engagement tracks, philanthropy acted as a bridge-builder. The **Kagiso Trust** collaborated with **Sinayo Global** to host the NextGen Africa Summit, bringing together SME leaders, women, and youth entrepreneurs to expand market access, strengthen partnerships, and improve access to capital and technology—submitting its outcomes to the B20. The **F20 Climate Solutions Forum** became an early rallying point for South African climate stakeholders and amplified collective influence within the G20 space. The **BMW Foundation Herbert Quandt**, collaborating

with the **Desmond & Leah Tutu Legacy Foundation**, contributed to the **African Climate Solutions Forum**, focusing on energy transition, urbanisation, and education—ensuring local realities shaped multilateral climate and development discussions. Meanwhile, the **Stirling Foundation** and the **Conrad N. Hilton Foundation** continued to sustain the **IF20**, ensuring faith actors remain active contributors to developmental debates across G20 cycles.

03 Philanthropy as Translator – Enabling New Voices to Join the Conversation

While G20 communiqués routinely commit to social protection, gender equality, youth opportunity, and inclusive development, philanthropy plays a unique role in translating these global priorities into local realities and ensuring that community voices shape the dialogue.

At the onset of South Africa's G20 presidency, the **Hlanganisa Community Fund** recognised a gap between the international process and community-level engagement. In response, it hosted public education webinars to demystify the G20, highlight opportunities for civic participation, and encourage grassroots actors to connect their local work to global commitments. Although activities were disrupted by the C20 leadership crisis, Hlanganisa's early efforts underscored the need for philanthropy to invest in continuity and civic literacy across G20 cycles.

Similarly, **Oxfam South Africa**, with philanthropic support, convened participatory agenda-setting sessions with civil society and community networks. These dialogues revealed both the need for deeper community understanding of G20 processes and the importance of linking grassroots priorities with formal engagement tracks such as the W20 and Y20. By leveraging its research and advocacy expertise, Oxfam helped bring marginalised perspectives into policy conversations on economic justice and gender equity.

The **Heinrich Böll Foundation's** South Africa office, through its support to the **ACG20** and participation in the **Social** and **People's Summits**, amplified feminist and agricultural voices—highlighting the lived realities of women and farmers driving food security. Together with partners such as the **Institute for Economic Justice (IEJ)**, the ACG20 used philanthropic backing to advocate for the inclusion of **Buffer Stocks for Food Security** on the G20 agenda. This collaboration shows how philanthropy can empower informal coalitions to serve as knowledge partners, bridging local insight and global policymaking.

In parallel, **WINGS**, in partnership with **IPASA** and South Africa members, established the **South Africa G20 Philanthropy Taskforce**—a platform for co-learning, intelligence sharing, and joint strategy among local philanthropic actors. The Taskforce strengthened the connection between domestic priorities and the global policy agenda, while building local capacity for long-term engagement in multilateral processes. By the second half of the year, the Taskforce expanded to include new members, laying the groundwork for continuity and coordinated philanthropy engagement through the 2026 U.S. G20 cycle.

04 Philanthropy as a Technical Partner – Shaping Policy by Adding Capacity

Philanthropy strengthens the G20's knowledge ecosystem by converting field insights into evidence and low-risk prototypes that inform policy decisions. In this role, philanthropy advances “knowledge diplomacy”—brokering research, data, and technical capacity into global policy spaces.

The **ACF** exemplified this during South Africa's G20 presidency through its support for the **African Experts Panel** convened by the Presidency. Many ACF grantees, including **Oxfam South Africa**, contributed research and advocacy that helped shape the panel's agenda, institutionalising civil society's role in knowledge generation and influencing G20 outcomes on finance and climate.

JET Education Services, a hybrid grantmaker–implementer, provided technical support to the **G20 Education Working Group** on micro-credentials and early childhood care and education. Collaborating with the **Department of Higher Education**, JET co-authored policy briefs and convened expert dialogues that strengthened evidence-based recommendations. Its deep roots in South Africa's education sector and prior partnerships with government enabled it to align on-the-ground insights with global priorities—demonstrating how philanthropic actors can contribute beyond funding by positioning their expertise within formal policy processes.

At the engagement-group level, **Krutham** supported **B20** stakeholders, including **Sanlam**, to design tools that track the real-world impact of G20 policy. Their work culminated in the [Sanlam ESG Barometer: B20 Policy Impact Special Report](#), a practical innovation that demonstrates how philanthropy-linked knowledge partners can drive accountability and overcome the “talkshop” challenge that often limits multilateral forums. Krutham also advised the **B20 Secretariat** on concept note development, reinforcing philanthropy's role in enhancing technical rigour across sectors.

Complementing these technical partnerships, **WINGS**, in collaboration with **IPASA** and the **Anglo American Foundation**, played a vital educational role by helping the broader philanthropy ecosystem understand the G20's structure and influence. Through the development of resources such as this **G20 Philanthropy Brief** and a **side event at the IPASA Annual Philanthropy Symposium**, local actors were equipped with the knowledge and frameworks needed to engage meaningfully in multilateral policy spaces. This capacity-building work reflects philanthropy's evolving role as both a **technical partner** and **translator of global governance for domestic stakeholders**, ensuring that future G20 cycles benefit from a more informed, coordinated, and influential philanthropic sector.

05 Philanthropy as Catalyst – Helping New Ideas Take Off

Philanthropy plays a catalytic role—helping translate ideas from pilot to policy and from commitment to implementation. During South Africa's G20 presidency, **WINGS** and its partners helped coordinate philanthropy's

engagement across multiple G20 spaces, ensuring that locally rooted ideas could reach global audiences and influence policy agendas.

The Anglo American Foundation used G20 momentum to spotlight urban renewal, backing initiatives like [Jozi my Jozi](#) to revitalise inner-city spaces and advance inclusive urban agendas. With upcoming global milestones—the World Urban Forum, the 10th anniversary of the New Urban Agenda, and the United Nations High-Level Political Forum review of SDG 6—these efforts are poised to influence the 2026 G20 agenda.

Meanwhile, **Oxfam South Africa** and the **New Economy Hub**, backed by the **Ford** and **Mott Foundations**, mobilised grassroots conversations around the “**Economy as Care**” agenda. Through communications campaigns, convenings, and research, they helped move a once-niche idea into spaces like the W20, G20 Social Summit, and We the 99, embedding social justice language into G20 discourse.

With the G20 experiencing delays with internal leadership struggles, WINGS and its partners pivoted to adopt a networked approach to strategic participation in the B20, whilst supporting philanthropy's involvement in other G20 spaces such as G20 Social, Y20, T20, etc. Through the B20 Infrastructure & Finance Taskforce, philanthropy was included in the Taskforce recommendations, specifically for its role in fostering public-private-philanthropy-people partnerships, sharing risk (first-loss, guarantees, technical assistance), and unlocking capital. WINGS, through the support of Anglo American Foundation, drew on this momentum to invest in developing a comprehensive business-philanthropy legacy that will provide consistent entry points for philanthropy into future B20 processes.

Beyond policy and advocacy, philanthropy also catalysed social investment innovation. The **Anglo American Foundation**, in partnership with **Savant** and **Krutham**, co-designed the **Aseli Impact Capital Fund**—an impact-focused Permanent Capital Vehicle created under a non-profit governance model. All returns are reinvested to create a self-sustaining pool of patient capital for high-potential green small and medium-sized enterprises. The Aseli Fund will de-risk early-stage enterprises, provides technical and commercialisation support, and fosters inclusive job creation before pursuing financial returns. Developed through a year-long co-design process with more than 30 partners, it exemplifies philanthropy's capacity to bridge business and development finance. Through the **B20–philanthropy alliance** facilitated by WINGS and its partners, Aseli has become a tangible model for how G20-linked partnerships can deliver action-oriented, locally grounded investment vehicles.

Finally, the **F20** harnessed momentum from its **Climate Solutions Forum** to forge cross-engagement consensus on climate and energy democracy. The resulting joint statement—endorsed by the W20, Y20, B20, and U20—demonstrated philanthropy's convening power to align diverse constituencies behind shared recommendations. This momentum continued beyond the G20, influencing global platforms such as **COP30** and the **Africa Climate Summit**, amplifying the reach of African leadership and ideas.

Recommendations

Philanthropy needs a shared backbone and flagship platforms to turn G20 engagement into sustained impact.

01. Build a Global Coordination Mechanism to ensure continuity, visibility, and a collective voice for philanthropy

- **Short-term (1–2 yrs):** Establish a Philanthropy Coordination Hub (hosted by WINGS with rotating national anchors) to mobilise the sector, align calendars, and coordinate engagement.
- **Medium-term (2–4 yrs):** Formalise the Hub as a cross-presidency mechanism with shared data, playbooks, and synthesis reports.
- **Long-term (5+ yrs):** Institutionalise the Hub as a formal Philanthropy Engagement Group within the G20, providing an enduring entry point for the sector.

02. Position philanthropy as a credible and strategic actor through evidence and data

- **Short-term:** Document philanthropy's G20 contributions and publish an annual Philanthropy @G20 Strategic Brief highlighting achievements, insights, and priorities.
- **Medium-term:** Develop a shared measurement framework to track impact and influence across G20 to capture impact and influence.
- **Long-term:** Maintain an independent Philanthropy Dashboard with independent evaluations and progress tracking demonstrating where philanthropy has unlocked relational, intellectual, and risk capital and what that has changed.

03. Advocate for an Enabling Environment to grow philanthropy's operating space through policy influence

- **Short-term:** Secure continued recognition of philanthropy in G20 outcomes and build connections with government partners.
- **Medium-term:** Deepen engagement with stakeholders and collaborate on joint advocacy (e.g., catalytic capital, cross-border giving).
- **Long-term:** Embed philanthropy's role in national development policies.

04. Institutionalise strategic partnerships to move from fragmented engagement to coordinated multi-stakeholder action.

- **Short-term:** Champion legacy initiatives that formalise philanthropy's participation (e.g., Business–Philanthropy Legacy in the B20).
- **Medium-term:** Resource and scale multi-stakeholder coordination mechanisms and design and pilot partnerships.
- **Long-term:** Scale MSPs to show evidence and action, developing national and regional frameworks and approaches.

Conclusion

Philanthropy's enduring contribution to the G20 lies not only in the capital it brings, but in its ability to connect knowledge, legitimacy, and trust across borders. By strengthening local agency, convening unlikely allies, and translating evidence into action, philanthropy helps

bridge the gap between global ambition and grounded progress. With sustained, structured coordination and shared accountability, the sector can ensure that G20 outcomes do more than inspire—they endure.