



G20 SOUTH AFRICA 2025



OCEAN20 NEWSLETTER

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NRF-SAEON successfully wraps up the Ocean20

By Melissa Philander, Nicole du Plessis, Tammy Morris and Safiyya Sedick

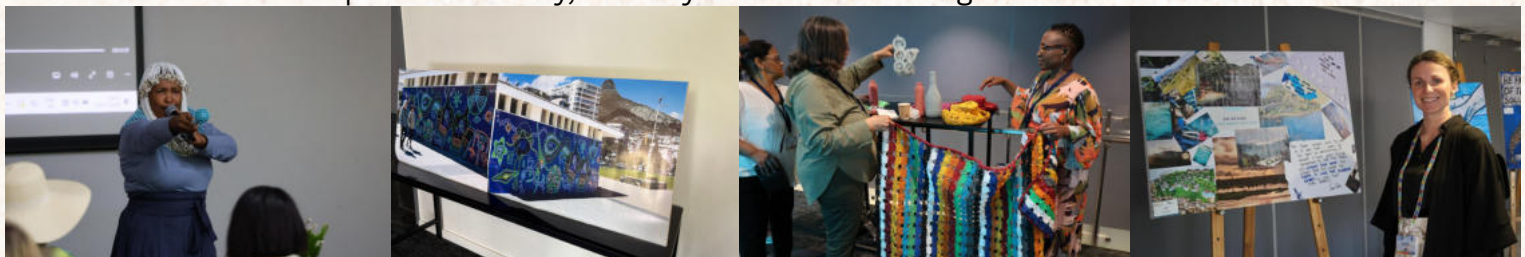
After a busy year the NRF-SAEON Egagasini Node have successfully handed over a joint statement and the presidency of the G20's social engagement group, Ocean20, to the USA.

Ocean20 played an important role in giving civil society, academia, industry and business a voice in building support for a sustainable ocean. Ocean20 strengthened and consolidated the presence of the ocean within the G20 throughout the year, leading to key roles during the G20 Social Summit.

Ocean20 South Africa Summit

The Ocean20 Summit was held on **4-5 November 2025** at **The Avenue, Waterfront in Cape Town**, and represented the culmination of all stakeholder engagements held throughout the year. The Summit proceedings were facilitated by Ms Yanga Malotana (University of Pretoria; SA IORAG Early-Career Professional Representative).

The event opened with a powerful performance titled **The Soul's Journey**, delivered in isiZulu by **Ms Mpume Mthombeni**. The performance reminded attendees of South Africa's deep cultural and spiritual ties to the ocean and set a reflective tone for the discussions ahead. Across the venue, artworks from Blue Schools learners and scientist-artists depicting sea-surface temperature patterns in the Southern Ocean were displayed. The Summit also showcased exhibitions from the South African National Women in Fisheries & Aquaculture (SANWFA), Captain FanPlastic and several other organisations, each highlighting various ocean initiatives. In addition, the **OKEANO All-Atlantic Photo Competition 2025** winners presented work that reflected the ocean as a place of identity, memory and collective imagination.





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Ocean20 Summit Celebration (Tapestry, Keiskamma Trust, 2025) showcased at the Ocean20 Summit.



Crocheted Ocean Surface Temperature Blanket by Dr Nicolette Chang (SOCCO).



Ocean Art by scholars of South African Blue Schools.



SANWFA representative showcasing her crocheted pieces made from recycled plastic.



Prints of the winning photography from the All Atlantic Ocean Photography competition



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Day 1: Opening, Cultural Connection, and Future Thinking

Following the performance, the Summit formally opened with remarks from **Dr Tammy Morris, Ocean20 Co-Chair**, who reflected on the journey since the April 2025 launch and the progress made in advancing the ocean space through national engagement, partnerships, and strengthened regional collaboration. Her message set the tone for a Summit focused on **inclusion, evidence-based action, and co-creation**.

Prof Carlos M. Duarte, CEO of the G20 Global Coral Reef R&D Accelerator Platform (CORDAP), was then welcomed to share a project update highlighting global efforts to protect and restore coral reef systems. He outlined the accelerating decline of coral reefs worldwide, noting that reefs support over one billion people and contribute more than USD 2.7 trillion annually to the global economy. Prof Duarte emphasised CORDAP's role as a G20-mandated initiative advancing research, innovation and capacity building to **halt biodiversity loss and restore degraded reef ecosystems**. He also shared progress on CORDAP's international programmes, including cutting-edge R&D solutions, expanded partnerships, and new investments aimed at strengthening coral resilience in a warming climate.

Prof Duarte concluded by encouraging delegates to support CORDAP's mission through three key avenues: amplifying awareness by sharing compelling stories that highlight the urgency of coral conservation; championing coral resilience as CORDAP Global Ambassadors, using their platforms to inspire collective action; and investing in lasting impact through funding, in-kind contributions or strategic partnerships that enable the expansion of CORDAP's restoration and research programmes.



Dr Tammy Morris delivering the opening speech at the Ocean20 Summit



Prof Carlos M. Duarte, CEO of the G20 Global Coral Reef R&D Accelerator Platform (CORDAP), presenting the CORDAP update at Ocean20 Summit.



Dr Laura Pereira (WITS University), leading the Future Thinking Workshop.

Emphasising the Ocean20 focus on action, the day continued with an interactive **Future Thinking workshop led by Prof. Laura Pereira (WITS University)**, where participants explored “seeds”, the ideas and innovations already emerging today, and worked in groups to imagine how these could shape different ocean futures. The session encouraged reflection on how current decisions may play out over time and what actions can be taken now to ensure a healthier, more resilient ocean. The day ended with an informal networking reception, allowing participants to strengthen connections across sectors and regions.



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Day 2: Panel Discussions and Shared Pathways Forward

The second day started with reflections from the workshop on Day 1 with groups providing interactive reflections on their discussions. The day then moved into deeper thematic engagement through four panel discussions covering women’s leadership in the Blue Economy; regenerative tourism through engagement with the private sector; ocean governance support tools; and reflections on the future from Early Career Ocean Professionals (ECOPs).



Panel 1 panellists (left to right): Ms Mathema Makola, Mr Poiho Ramotlatsi, Ms Mapule Mthimkhulu, Ms Mashebane Thosago, Ms Nadia Scheffer, and Dr Bernice Mclean.

Panel 1 opened with a presentation by **Ms Dimakatso Setati** from the **South African National Women In Fisheries & Aquaculture (SANWFA)**, who highlighted the untapped potential of seaweed farming as a transformative livelihood opportunity for women and youth in coastal communities. She demonstrated how seaweed cultivation offers low-cost entry points into the blue economy while supporting food security, climate resilience, carbon sequestration and circular value chains. Her presentation underscored that South Africa’s rich diversity of seaweed species creates opportunities for sustainable aquaculture, alternative livelihoods, and local enterprise development, particularly for women who are often excluded from mainstream fisheries.

A discussion, moderated by **Ms Mathema Makola**, took place following Ms Setati’s presentation. The panel comprised **Ms Mashebane Thosago, Ms Nadia Scheffer, Ms Mapule Mthimkhulu, Dr Bernice Mclean, and Mr Poiho Ramotlatsi**. The conversation highlighted women’s essential yet frequently undervalued roles across fisheries and aquaculture, from post-harvest processing and trade to innovation, training and community leadership. Panellists emphasised the need to **strengthen women’s networks**, such as **African Women Fish Processors and Traders Network (AWFISHNET)**, expand access to technology, training, and finance, and develop local supply chains that retain economic value within coastal communities. The discussion also pointed to the importance of supportive regulatory environments and mentorship pathways that enable women to drive both social and ecological transitions within the blue economy. Together, the presentation and panel discussion reinforced that women are not merely participants in the ocean sector, they are essential leaders in shaping sustainable and inclusive blue economies.



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Panel 2 panellists (left to right): Ms Estelle van der Merwe, Prof Ameer A. Eweida, Dr Maryam Ficociello, and Ms Safiyya Sedick.

Panel 2, with Prof Ameer A. Eweida (AEON Collective), Dr Maryam Ficociello (Red Sea Global), and Ms Estelle van der Merwe (OCEAN Action Network), and moderated by Ms Safiyya Sedick, explored regenerative tourism and private sector engagement as a model for marine ecosystems restoration and creating long-term economic and social value.

Panellists emphasised that regenerative approaches go beyond sustainability, requiring tourism activities to contribute positively to biodiversity, local communities and climate resilience. They highlighted the importance of science-based decision making, innovative financing, and youth-driven projects that connect ecological restoration with job creation.

As an example of regenerative and circular-economy innovation in South Africa, Ms van der Merwe referenced the recent launch of a harbour-based fishing-net recycling initiative led by OCEAN Action Network at the V&A Waterfront, which converts discarded nets into reusable material. This project demonstrates how practical, community-aligned solutions can reduce marine pollution while supporting livelihoods.

The panel concluded that regenerative tourism, supported by circular-economy initiatives like the fishnet recycling project, offers a promising pathway to rebuild ecosystems, stimulate local enterprise, and position coastal communities as leaders in ocean stewardship.

Panel 3 brought together Ms Yan Li (China Oceanic Development Foundation), Dr Shannon Hampton (Independent Consultant), Dr Samantha Petersen (WWF-SA), and Dr Diane Foster (Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute), moderated by Ms Safiyya Sedick. The panel emphasised Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) as a crucial governance tool for coordinating activities across sectors and jurisdictions, ensuring that ecological limits are respected while supporting sustainable economic activities. Speakers stressed that MSP is not only a technical exercise, but a process of institutional transformation that enables countries to translate global ocean commitments into national and regional implementation.



Panel 3 panellists (left to right): Dr Samantha Petersen, Dr Shannon Hampton, Ms Yan Li, Dr Diane Foster, and Ms Safiyya Sedick.

Lessons from China highlighted the value of whole-system planning, nature-based solutions, and the importance of meeting ecological thresholds to maintain ocean health. In Africa, emerging MSP frameworks demonstrate the need for regionally tailored approaches, peer learning, and stronger integration of data systems. The panel also discussed complementary tools such as ocean accounting, which can quantify ecosystem services and bring the true value of the ocean into national planning and finance. Speakers called for hybrid financing models, improved capacity building, and inclusive planning processes that ensure local communities and vulnerable groups benefit from ocean governance.



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Panel 4 panellists (left to right): Dr Riesna Audh, Dr Mia Strand, Ms Maggie Poulos, Mr Khotso Mogotlane, Ms Philile Mvula, and Ms Sina Wallschuss.

Panel 4 featured Ms Sina Wallschuss, Mr Khotso Mogotlane, Ms Maggie Poulos, and Ms Philile Mvula, moderated by Dr Riesna Audh (NRF-SAEON) and Dr Mia Strand (Nelson Mandela University). The session explored the evolving roles, challenges, and opportunities facing Early Career Ocean Professionals (ECOPs). It opened with an interactive poll revealing a diverse audience, from undergraduate students to senior researchers, highlighting that many professional challenges in the ocean sector persist across career stages. Panelists discussed systemic barriers such as unclear career pathways, limited funding opportunities, short-term contracts, and the undervaluing of ECOP contributions in research, governance, and policy. They emphasised that meaningful inclusion of ECOPs requires more than token representation; it involves ensuring their voices shape national, regional, and global conversations on ocean sustainability. Mentorship emerged as a key priority, with calls for accessible, structured mentorship networks that support skill development, confidence, and long-term engagement in the sector. The panel concluded that empowering ECOPs is essential for building a future-ready, resilient ocean governance system, and that investment in emerging leaders is a strategic necessity for the sector.



Ocean20 Communique being handed over to US delegate (left to right): Dr Gilbert Siko (DSTI), Dr Tammy Morris, Dr Diane Foster (Woodhole Oceanic Institute, USA), and Mr Imraan Patel (DSTI)

The Summit concluded with a high-level closing session during which Dr Tammy Morris presented the final Ocean20 Communiqué. Dr Diane Foster (USA) and Mr Imraan Patel (DSTI) commended South Africa's leadership and the year-long emphasis on equity, inclusion, and elevating Africa's voice within global ocean governance. The session ended with the formal handover of the Ocean20 Chairship to the United States, marking the transition into the next phase of the initiative.



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G20 SOCIAL SUMMIT (18–20 November 2025, Boksburg)



Ocean20 South Africa team at the NRF-SAEON Exhibition Booth, showcasing the Blue School's artwork.

Day 1: Opening Plenary, Cultural Performances and Exhibitions

The G20 Social Summit opened on 18 November 2025 with an official plenary addressed by South African Deputy President Paul Mashatile, who emphasised the importance of social dialogue, equality and multilateral collaboration under South Africa's G20 Presidency. Senior government representatives, engagement groups and civil society organisations gathered to set the stage for three days of discussions on social, environmental and economic priorities.

The opening programme included cultural performances and reflections on South Africa's heritage, alongside exhibitions from across the G20 engagement groups. The NRF-SAEON science engagement team showcased artwork from the Blue Schools Programme, using scholar-created artwork to highlight how the next generation perceives the ocean's value and vulnerability. This exhibition attracted significant interest and demonstrated the role of early ocean literacy in building long-term stewardship.



The Ocean20 team also hosted a second Ocean Future Visioning session with Prof. Laura Pereira, inviting a new group of participants and bringing fresh perspectives on how the ocean could feature in different future scenarios. Throughout the day, the Ocean20 co-leads, engaged in various discussions across the thematic areas to raise awareness of ocean issues within the broader social dialogue, reinforcing that ocean health is deeply connected to equity, food security, livelihoods and climate justice.

Ocean Future Visioning attendees with Prof. Laura Pereira (back row, furthest right), holding pictures displaying futurist ocean characters.



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Day 2: Thematic Area Discussions and Ocean20 Leadership

Day 2 focused on intensive thematic discussions facilitated by the various G20 engagement groups. These sessions covered priority areas including Digital Inclusion and AI, Trade and Inclusive Value Chains, Sustainable Finance, Inclusive Climate Justice, and Building Momentum for the SDGs and Agenda 2063.

A key highlight was the leadership demonstrated by the Ocean20 co-leads. Dr Tamaryn Morris co-moderated Thematic Area 3: Inclusive Climate Justice, a Just Transition, and Energy Democracy, helping shape discussions on community-centred climate action and sustainable transitions. Ms Nicole du Plessis co-moderated Thematic Area 5: Accelerating Momentum for the SDGs and Agenda 2063, and later co-led the wrap up session on the final Social Summit Declaration.



Dr Tammy Morris moderating Thematic Area 3: Inclusive Climate Justice, a Just Transition, and Energy Democracy.

Ms Nicole du Plessis leading the Social Summit Declaration discussions wrap up.

Day 3: Handover and Presentation of the G20 Social Summit Declaration

The final day of the Summit centred on the formal handover of the G20 Social Summit Declaration to the President of South Africa, President Cyril Ramaphosa. The Declaration reflected the collective recommendations of civil society and engagement groups, capturing priorities such as social inclusion, equitable transitions and global cooperation. Ocean20's contributions, through thematic moderation, exhibition engagement, and future-thinking dialogue, helped ensure that ocean considerations were integrated into the Declaration. The involvement of the G20 Troika, including representatives of Brazil, underscored South Africa's commitment to the continuity of the Social Summit. The closing session reaffirmed the central message of the Social Summit: that social justice, economic resilience and environmental sustainability, including the health of our ocean, are inseparable pillars of global development.



Children20 representative handing over the Social Summit Declaration to President Cyril Ramaphosa.

G20 Engagement Group leads with President Cyril Ramaphosa.





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Ocean20 Communiqué

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Ocean20 Communiqué

Advancing a Sustainable and Inclusive Ocean Economy

Solidarity Equality Sustainability

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G20 Social Summit Declaration 2025

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G20 SOCIAL SUMMIT 2025 DECLARATION

PREAMBLE

We, the delegates of the G20 Social Summit, gathered for the first time on African soil, under the Presidency of the Republic of South Africa. United in advancing the theme "Solidarity, Equality and Sustainability", the G20 Social Summit convened at a time when the global architecture is confronted by deepening inequality, rising conflict and instability, climate fragility, debt vulnerability, financial distress, contestation for critical minerals, and rapid green, blue, circular and digital transitions.

Drawing from Africa's tradition of inclusive dialogue, consensus-building, and community-driven development, and following a year-long national outreach programme under the South African Presidency including more than 230 community dialogues under the banner of a "People's G20", this historic Social Summit represented the collective voice and agency of international organisations, engagement groups, civil society networks, communities, and social partners in shaping a people-centred contribution to the G20 Leaders' Track.

The Social Summit amplified diverse voices, strengthened social cohesion, and forged collective, consensus-based solutions where every voice matters, including those of workers, youth, children, women, persons with disabilities, immigrants, indigenous communities, traditional and faith leaders, academia, queer communities supporting economic prosperity for all.

Guided by the philosophy of Ubuntu, "I am because we are", We, the delegates, reflect our collective commitment to inclusive development, ethical governance, sustainable transitions, and global solidarity herein.

DIGITAL INCLUSION & EQUITABLE TRANSFORMATION

Digital inclusion and equitable transformation demands a foundation where every individual can connect affordably, access digital resources confidently, and participate safely in the opportunities of a modern economy. Achieving this requires expanding environmentally conscious infrastructure, bridging geographic and linguistic divides, and embedding digital literacy throughout education systems so that no community is left behind. At the same time, a human-centred digital ecosystem that is grounded in dignity, autonomy, cultural identity, and ethical governance is essential to prevent technology from entrenching historic inequities. Rights-based frameworks, community stewardship of data, and participatory structures that elevate youth and indigenous voices strengthen both trust and relevance. Wholistic legislation, accountable governance, and responsible platform design must work together to safeguard all people online, ensuring that digital environments empower rather than expose them. When individuals are connected, skilled, and protected, societies can innovate, transact, learn, and engage fully. We urge the G20 member states to advance a digital future where every community shares in the benefits of transformation.

We call for affordable, equitable access to digital ecosystems, that is alongside universal and relevant digital literacy ensuring that everyone can participate safely and confidently in the digital world. This requires expanding access to People-First Infrastructure.

#G20SouthAfrica | #ReKaofela | #G20Social2025 | www.g20.org.za

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