

SPECIAL EDITION

SEP
2025



CITY LEADERS GATHER IN JOBURG

FOR AFRICA'S FIRST U20 SUMMIT

INSIDE
metros


U20
Johannesburg – Tshwane
2025



U20 Summit: Cities are engines of global solutions, says Dada Morero

By Thapelo Molefe



Joburg Executive Mayor Dada Morero addressing the U20 Summit. (Photo: Eddie Mtsweni)

Johannesburg mayor Dada Morero opened the Urban 20 (U20) Mayoral Summit this month by declaring that cities are not just sites of

global problems, but “engines of economic opportunity and social care,” capable of driving the solutions to some of the world’s most urgent

challenges.

Speaking before delegates from across various cities around the world, Morero



stressed that the success of cities depends on access to the right financial tools.

“From climate action to social services, from housing to local infrastructure, municipal finance is the bridge that turns ambition into results,” said Morero.

He emphasised that the summit, held on African soil for the first time, provides a platform to mobilise resources so that no city or community is left behind.

Morero highlighted Johannesburg’s resilience, from its origins as a mining town to its current status as a metropolis of over five million people, and framed the city’s hosting of the U20 as a historic step in strengthening the influence of local governments within the G20 process.

“This is a pivotal moment for city diplomacy. Cities are not junior partners, but global political actors in their own right,” he said.

Tshwane Mayor Nasiphi Moya, co-chairing the summit, reinforced Africa’s leadership role in global urban governance.

She pointed to the African

Mayors’ Assembly in June, where over 40 leaders spoke with a united voice.

“Africa is not a bystander. Africa is the driver of solutions,” she said.

Moya announced that Tshwane had recently secured R86 billion in investment pledges at a city investment summit, describing it as part of a broader strategy to raise capital for infrastructure.

“Too often municipalities have the will and the vision, but lack the financial resources to drive those ambitions. We cannot continue to allow this to limit progress,” she said.

Both leaders tied the summit’s agenda to four priorities: Economic opportunity and financing, climate action and urban resilience, social inclusion and equity, and digital transformation and innovation.

Over the three-day summit, city leaders are expected to shape these discussions into a communique that will influence G20 decisions under South Africa’s presidency.

The South African Local Government Association (SALGA) President Bheke Stofile

used the platform to call for a reformed funding model.

He noted that municipalities in South Africa receive just 9% of national revenue compared to a global average of 20%.

“If municipalities are underfunded, the nation limps,” he said, urging greater recognition of local governments as equal partners in shaping global policy.

Stofile also linked city leadership to peace-building, warning that wars and conflicts devastate local infrastructure and drain resources from development.

“Cities must become advocates for peace,” he said, citing Nelson Mandela’s words that courageous people do not fear forgiving for the sake of peace.

The U20, convened by C40 Cities and the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), is the only G20 track led by mayors rather than national governments.

Johannesburg’s hosting of the summit marks a milestone for Africa’s role in global city diplomacy, with leaders insisting that global change must begin city by city and community by community.



African cities push for direct financing amid rising urban pressures

By Thapelo Molefe



A high-powered panel discussion on strategies on how to finance cities. (Photo: Eddie Mtsweni)

African city leaders are demanding stronger financing tools to address climate change, infrastructure gaps, and rapid urbanisation, warning that without direct access to predictable funds, municipalities will struggle to deliver services to their growing populations.

At the U20 Summit in Sandton this past weekend, mayors, municipal leaders, and development banks debated “Finance Your Cities: Sub-National Development Banks & Country Platforms for Localising Finance.”

The discussion highlighted both innovative financing models and the ongoing

struggles of smaller municipalities.

Mayor of Antananarivo, Harilala Ramanantsoa, presented Madagascar’s new Finance for Cities Madagascar initiative, a country platform designed to channel resources directly to local governments.



“It is not a slogan, it’s an operating model – a financial architecture that brings us closer to sources of financing,” Ramanantsoa said.

The platform integrates national ministries, local authorities, and development partners, backed by the IMF’s Resilience and Sustainability Trust (RST) and the V20 Climate Prosperity Plan.

At its heart is the Local Development Fund, described as a “bank of the last kilometre,” connecting smaller municipalities with international and national financing sources.

Ramanantsoa called on African governments to institutionalise such platforms, formally integrate sub-national development banks, and create predictable pipelines for climate and infrastructure funding.

“Our promise is to transform promises into activities, intentions into infrastructures, and discourses into jobs,” she said.

South Africa’s Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA) showcased how a strong national development bank can anchor municipal financing.

Head of Transacting for Municipalities and Water Boards at the DBSA, Ben Mokhe-seng, said the bank acts as a “municipal bank,” with a third of its portfolio dedicated to cities and utilities.

Over the years, DBSA has shifted from lending to providing end-to-end support from master planning and project preparation to financing and implementation.

“Financing alone is not enough. The real challenge is municipal capacity,” Mokhe-seng said.



Trade and industry Minister Parks Tau addressing U20 summit on financing cities. (Photo: Eddie Mtsweni)



“When we provide financing, we also deploy planning and capacity-building instruments. Otherwise, you get projects that run over budget or fail to deliver services.”

DBSA also plays a role in strengthening governance and revenue management while supporting municipalities with long-term partnerships, often lasting five years or more.

Johannesburg and Tshwane have already accessed DBSA loans to expand infrastructure, with Mokheseng noting that robust financial markets allow South Africa's metros to issue bonds – a model that could be replicated elsewhere on the continent.

Despite progress, rural and smaller municipalities remain at risk of being excluded from financing conversations.

Mayor of Tswelopele Local Municipality in the Free State, Kenalemang Phukuntsi, welcomed DBSA's assistance with master plans but said her community of 60,000 lacks the technical and financial capacity to im-

plement climate transition projects.

“Our communities understand the effects of climate change, but municipalities are not ready,” she said.

“We cannot be left behind while bigger cities move ahead with just transition plans.”

Phukuntsi urged DBSA and development partners to accelerate support for rural municipalities and ensure equitable access to financing.

“It's not enough to only support Johannesburg, Cape Town or Tshwane. Secondary and rural municipalities must also be included if we are to meet climate targets,” she said.

The African Development Bank (AfDB) noted that it had just completed its first municipal loan to the City of Johannesburg and was working to expand financing to other cities.

Its Urban and Municipal Development Fund (UMDF) provides early-stage support to help municipalities prepare for financing.

Session facilitator Carlos de

Freitas of FMDV stressed that sub-national development banks provide stability in ways that international partners often cannot.

“If there is a national crisis, DBSA stays. That is why country platforms and NDBs must be central to financing local governments,” he said.

Africa is projected to add one billion urban residents in the next two decades. Without sustainable financing at the local level, experts warn, cities will not cope with infrastructure demand or climate pressures.

The U20 debate underscored both innovation and inequality, while platforms like Madagascar's show promise and cities like Johannesburg benefit from established financial systems but smaller municipalities continue to lack access.

For African cities, the path forward is clear: financing must move closer to the ground, empowering local governments to turn national commitments into real infrastructure, services, and jobs.



Global urban leaders call for social inclusion over division at U20 Summit

By Thapelo Molefe



Delegates and city leaders unpacking ways on how urban leaders can tackle global challenges from youth unemployment and migration to climate change. (Photo: Eddie Mtsweni)

The urgent need to build inclusive societies in the face of rising inequality, displacement, and political polarisation took centre stage at the U20 Summit in Sandton this past weekend, where mayors, councillors, and youth leaders called for “bridges, not walls” in shap-

ing the future of cities.

Moderated by Rashid Seedat of the Gauteng City-Region Observatory, the panel brought together South Africa’s Youth20 representative Raymond Matlala, Toronto Councillor Alejandra Bravo, and Ramallah Mayor Issa Kassis to share how

local governments are grappling with exclusion and inequality.

The panel formed part of the U20 Summit’s broader focus on how urban leaders can tackle global challenges from youth unemployment and migration to climate change through solidarity,



equity-driven policy, and collective action.

“The walls that divide weaken us. Bridges strengthen and connect us,” said Matlala, warning that high youth unemployment, which exceeds 60% in some South African provinces, continues to entrench spatial and economic divisions.

He urged governments to act decisively on service delivery and job creation.

“If ministries can’t deliver on youth employment, fire them. We’ve been talking for too long. We need action.”

Matlala also reminded delegates that young people are not passive beneficiaries but active participants in shaping the future of cities.

He stressed that inclusion must mean accessible education, investment in digital skills, and opening doors for youth entrepreneurship.

“We must stop treating youth as a ticking time bomb and start recognis-

ing them as the solution,” he said.

He challenged city leaders to make budgets reflect priorities for the youth and to “put [your] money where your mouth is” by funding youth innovation programmes instead of endless conferences.

Bravo highlighted Toronto’s “hyper-diverse” reality, where nearly half the population was born outside Canada, but rising inequality and homelessness are testing the city’s progressive policies.

“Toronto is now the most unequal city in Canada,” she said, noting that climate change, housing shortages, and political polarisation are fuelling social tensions.

“We have no choice but to act. Our approach is human rights-informed, from affordable housing on public land to targeted anti-racism strategies.”

From a context of occupation, Mayor Kassis detailed how Ramallah is fostering

resilience through youth engagement, innovation hubs, and inclusive urban planning despite restrictions on land and movement.

“Palestine is a young society, 65% are under 40 and they demand policies that reflect their aspirations,” he said.

“Resilience came as a gift from God to the Palestinian people, and we must use it to build inclusion, even under occupation.”

Seedat drew parallels between the three contexts, noting that while South Africa battles deep inequality, Canada faces backlash against inclusion, and Palestine contends with occupation, all share the challenge of ensuring social justice in divided societies.

The discussion underscored the role of cities in leading inclusive development where national governments often falter.

“The superior metric for judging an economy’s health should be equity, not just growth,” Bravo said.

Cities say restoring trust in democracy starts with fixing housing, inequality and basic services

By Thapelo Molefe

The erosion of trust in democracy will not be reversed by speeches or global declarations but by fixing everyday issues such as housing, inequality and access to reliable services, city leaders warned as the Urban 20 (U20) Summit closed in Sandton.

United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) Secretary-General Emilia Saiz told delegates that the faith of citizens in political systems has collapsed because governments have failed to meet basic needs.

“We will only be able to regain trust in democracy and co-creation if we address everyday needs, the local service provision that you are trying to deliver,” she said, adding that the



United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) Secretary-General Emilia Saiz. (Photo: Eddie Mtsweni)



U20's agenda is an "agenda of hope" rooted in local realities.

The Three-day summit, co-hosted by Johannesburg and Tshwane, was the first Urban 20 held on African soil.

Its communique, endorsed by more than 30 delegations, outlines city priorities on affordable housing, food security, sustainable mobility, climate action and digital transition.

Leaders argued these are not abstract policy goals but critical tests of whether democratic governance can deliver.

Kitchener Mayor and UCLG co-president Berry Urbanovic said cities were indispensable partners to national governments but warned that growing inequality, exclusion and distrust made it urgent to "rebuild the social contract from the bottom up."

He stressed that the communique was a call to

place care, equality, participation and dignity at the centre of how our societies work.

Programme director Edgar Pieterse, who is the Director of the African Centre for Cities, framed the summit within Africa's Agenda 2063 and the rising demands of young people.

He said youth across the continent were "refusing to put up with the injustices that have been normalised," making service delivery failures and inequality flashpoints for political legitimacy.

While climate change and financing dominated earlier sessions, the closing discussions circled back to how local governance is experienced by ordinary residents.

Saiz argued that if citizens do not see improvements in housing, transport or access to clean water, trust in both local and national institutions will continue

to erode.

"These are not talk shows. You go back home and make decisions that influence life," she said.

The communique now heads to the G20 presidency, with mayors insisting its success depends on turning its commitments into tangible outcomes.

As Urbanovic put it, the challenge is not to add another layer of rhetoric, but to ensure cities become the frontline of rebuilding democracy by tackling inequality and improving the quality of daily life.



Morero says Johannesburg must lead Africa's urban transformation

By Thapelo Molefe



Joburg Mayor Dada Morero and Tshwane Mayor Nasiphi Moya. (Photo: Eddie Mtsweni)

Johannesburg Mayor Dada Morero has vowed that Africa's biggest metropolis will not only confront its deepening service delivery crises, but also position itself as a continental leader in shaping global urban policy.

Addressing delegates at the U20 Mayoral Summit, Morero said Johannesburg's fragile infrastructure and entrenched inequality should not be seen only as weaknesses but as a "test case" for new models of sustainable urban growth.

"This responsibility given to us was a clear recognition that Africa has a local government



Joburg Mayor Dada Morero and Tshwane Mayor Nasiphi Moya co-chairing a panel discussion at the U20 Summit. (Photo :Eddie Mtsweni)

voice. This voice will be used to champion our collective objectives of making cities more sustainable, inclusive and prosperous,” he said.

Morero linked Johannesburg’s future to four priorities agreed to at the summit: access to financing, resilience against climate shocks, collaboration between cities, and placing people at the centre of policy.

“The way forward is clear. These outcomes are not the end, they are the beginning,”

he said.

Johannesburg, which continues to struggle with rolling blackouts, decaying water systems, and waste collection failures, has faced mounting criticism over its ability to deliver basic services.

Morero said that fixing the city required a “shared vision that changes the lives of ordinary people” and called for budgets to be directly tied to long-term strategic objectives.

The summit gave Johannesburg a rare opportunity to showcase leadership on the global stage, even as it faces mounting local governance challenges.

Morero insisted that the commitments adopted must not remain rhetorical.

“By translating commitments into action, we can deliver meaningful impact on the ground,” he said.



Tshwane mayor pledges action on inequality and climate change as city battles governance instability

By Thapelo Molefe



Tshwane Mayor Nasiphi Moya. (Photo: Eddie Mtsweni)

Tshwane Mayor Nasiphi Moya has placed inequality reduction and climate change at the heart of the capital city's agenda, pledging that residents will see tangible delivery beyond policy state-

ments.

Speaking at the U20 Summit, Moya said the city of four million people could not afford lofty promises without results.

“The City of Tshwane fully endorses this communiqué. It talks to the priorities of our city, it talks to the daily struggles of our people, and you can count Tshwane in,” she told delegates.



Her remarks come as Tshwane continues to wrestle with political instability, labour disputes, and crumbling infrastructure.

Moya said the city's pressing inequalities, from uneven water access to digital divides, demanded urgent intervention.

"Inequalities must be reduced in our cities. We must do the best to create economic opportunities for our people. We must aggressively deal with the impact of climate change," she said.

"We must be creative and innovative in finding this climate finance. It cannot be a far-fetched dream to get this finance."

The mayor also emphasised the importance of African leadership in global forums.

"We made a conscious decision to call our sisters and brothers who are leading in African cities and made them part of the conversation. You will see in the communiqué there is a strong emphasis on the voice of Af-

rican city leaders. That was intentional," she said.

Moya stressed that Tshwane's residents would ultimately judge the city by delivery, not declarations.

"This is a call to action. We must go back to our cities and implement each and every proposal," she said.

"That's how we're going to be understood, that's how we're going to be believed, whether we believe in what we are proposing or not."





Morero says Johannesburg must lead Africa's urban transformation

By Thapelo Molefe

Local leaders, labour organisations and development financiers have stressed that cities must be placed at the centre of the global just transition agenda if climate policies are to succeed, warning that exclusion will undermine both social and environmental progress.

Speaking at the U20 summit during a panel titled "From Global and National Commitments to Local Impact: Advancing a Just Transition in Cities", eThekweni Deputy Mayor Zandile Myeni said municipalities are already confronting the harsh realities of climate change, including tornadoes and rising sea levels, and need policy shifts that integrate all sectors of society.

"We had to look at a policy shift that would assist us

to plan accordingly," Myeni said, citing the city's Climate Change Forum, which brings together academia, civil society, business and government.

"At the beginning there was resistance, especially in some sectors, but we said we cannot continue working in silos. Communities must feel they have a stake in these policies."

Myeni urged G20 leaders to formally recognise local governments as partners in climate planning and financing.

"It's now or never for them to create a seat for us as the leaders of the cities," she said.

Karl Pfeffer, of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), warned that well-intentioned policies can inadvertently harm

vulnerable groups.

He pointed to South African waste pickers, whose livelihoods could be lost under formal solid waste management reforms unless protections are built in.

"A policy is not necessarily by nature inclusive," Pfeffer said.

"Through social dialogue -- bringing together municipalities, workers and business -- we can make sure no one is left behind."

He emphasised the ILO's just transition guidelines, which focus on skills development, occupational safety, SME support and decent work standards.

Megan Euston-Brown, Director at Sustainable Energy Africa, stressed the importance of grounding



policy in everyday realities.

She highlighted Johannesburg's engagement with community radio to develop language around climate change and projects such as tree planting, river clean-ups and urban food gardens.

"People worry about food, about heat, about disasters. Cities must make climate action tangible and visible, while also building skills for the green economy," she said.

From a financing perspec-

tive, Victoria Flattau of the African Development Bank (AfDB) said development banks are shifting towards bottom-up approaches, including direct subnational loans and grants for municipalities.

She noted that AfDB recently issued its first loan to the City of Johannesburg and is embedding gender and youth inclusion into clean energy projects.

"Climate transitions are not only about carbon reduction, but really about improving people's lives,"

Flattau said.

"Localisation of finance is essential to ensure that climate and development funds reflect the realities of communities."

Panellists agreed that cities need stronger mandates, sustained financing, and capacity-building partnerships to deliver just transition initiatives.

They cautioned that without meaningful inclusion of communities, workers, women and youth, global climate ambitions will falter.



Morero touts Johannesburg revival as Salga pushes for overhaul of local government funding

By Thapelo Molefe



South African Local Government Association (Salga) President Bheke Stofile. (Photo Eddie Mtsweni)

Johannesburg Mayor Dada Morero says the city is ready to cement its place as a world-class African hub as it prepares to host the G20 summit in

October, while South African Local Government Association (Salga) President Bheke Stofile has called for urgent reform of the funding model underpinning municipalities across the country.

Morero, fresh from presiding over the Urban 20 (U20), said Johannesburg's successful hosting of major events showed its ability to deliver on the global stage.

“It's a great opportunity for Johannesburg, it continues to position us much better in hosting big events, and continuously to demonstrate that Johannesburg has the capacity to host prestigious events of this nature,” he said.

But he conceded that the city faces deep challenges, particularly in the decaying inner city.



“Yes, we’ve got the challenges of decay in the inner city, the CBD. We’re doing quite a lot of work to try and turn it around. But we’ll never do it alone. We require partners, civil society, business and property owners to also come on board,” Morero said.

The mayor said bylaw enforcement and crime prevention had been prioritised to restore order and attract investment.

Johannesburg already contributes around 2% growth to the national GDP, outperforming other metros, and Morero pledged to increase this by another percentage point in the next five years.

While Johannesburg seeks to revitalise its urban core and expand its economic contribution, Stofile warned that many municipalities across South Africa remain trapped in dysfunc-

tion because of structural flaws in local government financing.

“The turning of local government requires all hands on deck,” Stofile said, adding that metros had to lead the change.

He convened all eight metro mayors in Cape Town recently to push for solutions, noting that their economies anchor the country’s growth.

On the review of the 1998 White Paper on Local Government, Stofile said the assumptions made then were proving unworkable for rural municipalities.

Stofile emphasised the need for differentiated treatment of municipalities, warning against a one-size-fits-all approach that equates metros such as Tshwane with small rural municipalities in KwaZulu-Natal.

Salga has submitted its views to the government along with more than 260 submissions from NGOs, higher education institutions and other stakeholders.

“As you look into the white paper review, we must deal simultaneously with the review of the assumption that led us to the funding. That it must be 9% allocated to municipalities,” Stofile said.

The contrasting perspectives highlight the twin challenges facing South Africa’s cities.

Johannesburg seeks to project itself as a global player while tackling local decay, and Salga insists that without a new funding model, municipalities country-wide will remain unable to meet their development mandates.



U20 SUMMIT GALLERY



PHOTOS BY : Eddie Mtsweni



PHOTOS BY : Eddie Mtsweni

***Proudly brought to
you by***



Prepared by

