

U20 2025 Webinar Concept Note

“Unlocking urban economic opportunities: Building resilient and inclusive cities”

**31 March 2025
14:00 to 15:30 (GMT +2)
Microsoft Teams**

1. Contextual overview

Cities around the world are adapting to dynamic global forces that are reshaping the economic landscape and redefining the requirements for success in the modern economy. Globalisation is driving rapid changes in technology, transportation, finance and global markets, increasing international trade and investment. At the same time, urbanisation is changing the economic geography, particularly in Asia and Africa, where the population in major cities increased from 29% in 1950 to 50% in 2009 and is expected to reach 60% by 2030. These shifts present opportunities and fluid dynamics as businesses and talent become increasingly mobile and cities need to adopt strategic approaches to attract investment and a skilled workforce. Cities that capitalise on these global trends can stimulate growth, create employment opportunities and enhance their global competitiveness.

Urban cities, particularly in the G20 countries, face significant challenges in achieving sustainable development and inclusive growth (UN-Habitat, 2023). As key drivers of the global economy, these cities must manage the complexities of rapid urbanisation, technological advancement and changing economic dynamics (World Bank, 2020). One of the biggest challenges is the growing mismatch between workforce skills and evolving market demands, which varies across regions. In developed countries like Japan, Germany and Italy, a persistent labour shortage is hindering growth, while urban regions in South Africa, Brazil and India struggle with high youth unemployment despite expanding economic sectors (African Development Bank, 2023). Meanwhile, the global expansion of AI-driven economies is transforming job markets and creating new opportunities worldwide but also poses risks to established professions.

Financial constraints remain a significant obstacle to cities' ability to implement long-term economic development strategies. Even in high-income G20 countries such as Canada, the United Kingdom and Australia, cities struggle to secure sustainable funding for urban development. Meanwhile, emerging economies such as Indonesia and Mexico face high debt burdens, limited private sector investment and restricted

access to long-term capital (UCLG, 2023). These financial challenges hinder innovation, infrastructure development and economic resilience. In addition, political fragmentation complicates efforts to achieve sustainable development, although economic and social sustainability initiatives can coexist (Basheer et al, 2022). Economic growth also remains disproportionately concentrated in urban cities, further marginalising smaller cities and rural regions (C40 Cities, 2024). Without integrated strategies, fragmented approaches will continue to hinder inclusive and sustainable economic development.

While global economic changes pose challenges, these changes also create opportunities for cities to adapt and change their strategies. Many cities are positioning themselves to take advantage of these trends while addressing local challenges. Key economic sectors in cities, such as logistics, manufacturing, technology, services and innovation, are central to urban economies. However, persistent employment issues driven by macroeconomic factors and migration patterns continue to hinder sustainable growth.

Inefficient regulatory systems are a major constraint to urban economic growth. The Subnational Doing Business studies highlight significant differences in regulatory efficiency within countries, with local bureaucratic procedures posing significant barriers to economic activity (World Bank, 2020). The Doing Business 2020 report also emphasises how municipal inefficiencies, such as long processing times for permits and a lack of digital systems for basic administrative functions, directly hinder local economic development (World Bank, 2020).

Addressing these inefficiencies is critical to fostering a more favourable business environment and accelerating urban economic growth. To overcome these barriers and leverage their competitive advantages, cities are developing comprehensive economic strategies that are aligned with global trends. These strategies typically focus on job creation, investment promotion and technological innovation in various sectors. Cities remain committed to tackling poverty, unemployment and inequality, with a focus on youth employment and inclusive growth. Through targeted interventions and strategic partnerships, cities aim to promote a more resilient economy that provides opportunities for all residents.

As globalisation, technological progress, urbanisation and the transition to a green economy introduce new economic opportunities, cities must ensure that these benefits are accessible to all. By fostering partnerships, driving innovation and supporting entrepreneurship, especially among youth and marginalised groups, cities can realise their full economic potential. By working together and sharing best practices, cities can stimulate local economies, attract sustainable investment and improve financial resilience. However, the centralisation of economic and innovation systems limits the ability of cities to develop an inclusive economy as local knowledge and non-formal economic practices are systematically marginalised (Joseph and Karuri-Sebina, 2022). National governance structures often position local governments as implementers rather than strategic economic drivers, which prevents cities from effectively using knowledge institutions and local expertise (Joseph and Karuri-Sebina, 2022). This top-down approach marginalises informal economic practices, limits local innovation and reduces the responsiveness of economic policies to the

diverse socio-economic realities of cities, particularly in the Global South (Joseph and Karuri-Sebina, 2022).

To realise their full potential, cities need to advocate for comprehensive decentralisation and create frameworks that enable meaningful knowledge transfer between national institutions and local contexts. This requires the recognition and legitimisation of informal economic activities and the empowerment of local actors to develop economic strategies that reflect the different realities of their communities. By promoting multilevel governance arrangements and participatory decision-making, cities can improve their ability to integrate formal and informal knowledge systems. Such an approach would not only foster innovation at local level but also create resilient and inclusive economies that are better equipped to tackle global challenges and drive sustainable urban development (Joseph and Karuri-Sebina, 2022).

1.1 Approach and webinar focus

This webinar is part of the cities' contribution to the U20 Summit agenda, aiming to explore the challenges and opportunities of sustainable and inclusive economic growth in urban areas. It will serve as a strategic forum to discuss emerging trends in trade, technology, infrastructure and sustainable development that can promote inclusive, long-term economic growth. The session will deliver practical insights through best practices and policy recommendations, focusing on investment attraction, sectoral development, workforce advancement and economic inclusion.

By bringing together city leaders, policymakers and industry experts, the webinar will facilitate best practice discussions and innovative solutions for economic resilience and growth. A panel consisting of speakers from three regions will share perspectives on various economic growth issues, followed by an interactive session where participants will engage the panellists on questions and comments that seek to contribute to shaping the future of urban economies. The outcomes of these discussions will inform the U20 Summit agenda while positioning cities as pioneers in sustainable urban economic development.

2. Purpose and objectives of the webinar

This webinar aims to explore pathways to sustainable and inclusive urban economic growth. Through focused dialogue, participants will examine innovative approaches to building resilient urban economies. The insights and recommendations generated will directly inform the U20 Summit agenda and contribute to the development of the U20 Communiqué that will be submitted to G20.

Among other things, the key objectives of the webinar are as follows:

- Identify challenges that cities face in attracting investment and creating economic opportunities
- Examine economic issues facing urban areas across the African continent and propose context-specific solutions
- Share strategies to capitalise on economic opportunities
- Present innovative economic initiatives and visions for the future

- Develop actionable recommendations for the U20 Summit to address local and global urban economic growth challenges

3. Target audience

The knowledge webinar targets U20 mayors, U20 members, policymakers, industry experts, academic and research institutions, international organisations, potential investors, financial institutions and economic development experts.

The knowledge webinar will be held as follows:

- Date: 31 March 2025
- Time: 14:00 to 15:30 (GMT +2)
- Venue: Microsoft Teams

4. Conclusion

As urban cities navigate the complexities of the global economy, they must balance seizing opportunities while addressing local challenges. Through strategic interventions, partnerships and a commitment to sustainable and inclusive growth, cities can strengthen their positions as economic hubs. This webinar represents an important step in fostering collaboration, sharing knowledge and charting paths to resilient futures. Working with global and local stakeholders, cities can demonstrate leadership in driving economic transformation. The focus remains on aligning with global trends while ensuring that economic growth benefits all communities.

5. Key questions to be addressed

1. How can cities balance rapid economic development by protecting vulnerable populations from displacement and rising costs?
2. How can local governments partner with small businesses to drive inclusive growth, especially for underrepresented entrepreneurs?
3. What do cities need to successfully unlock economic opportunities and access sustainable financing for inclusive growth and development?
4. How can cities drive equitable economic growth and reduce urban poverty?

6. Speaker profiles

Facilitator



Mr Khulekani Mathe is the Chief Executive Officer of Business Unity South Africa (BUSA), overseeing operations, policy coordination and stakeholder engagement. He is a seasoned expert in policy development, financial inclusion and economic transformation. Mr Mathe has extensive experience across the public and private sectors. Prior to joining BUSA, he was Head of Financial Inclusion at the

Banking Association South Africa, leading initiatives in banking transformation, small business development and financial education. He served in various positions in the public service in the Presidency, the National Planning Commission Secretariat and the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation. During his tenure in the National Planning Commission Secretariat, he was part of the team that wrote the National Development Plan, as well as head of the Secretariat. In the early parts of his career, Mr Mathe spent 15 years in the education sector working with various organisations in the field of adult education. During this period, he was appointed head of Tembalethu Community Education Centre and led it to win two national awards and one international award for its work. In recognition of his leadership, he was appointed chairman of the Ministerial Committee to review adult education policy for South Africa in 2007. He served in the structures that set up and governed the Education Training and Development SETA in its formative years.

Speakers



Cllr Nasiphi Moya is the Executive Mayor of Tshwane and U20 Co-chair for the 2025 cycle. She graduated with a Bachelor of Social Science Politics and Public Policy and Administration from the University of Cape Town (UCT) in 2007. She furthered her studies at UCT and was awarded with an honours degree in Social Science, specialising in Public Affairs and Administration in 2008.

In 2011, she obtained her Master of Philosophy from UCT, specialising in Public Policy and Administration. She later obtained her PhD in Political Science from the University of the Western Cape in 2021. She is an action-oriented leader who is passionate about service delivery.



Public Affairs from Sciences Po Paris and a master's degree from HEC Paris.

Ms Camille Viros is Head of the Inclusive Growth in Cities Unit at the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in Paris. Her expertise covers issues related to urban inequalities and housing, as well as broader policies that promote competitive and inclusive cities. She also coordinates the OECD Champion Mayors for Inclusive Growth Initiative, a group of 70 mayors from across the world committed to reducing inequalities. She holds a master's degree in Economic Analysis and Policy from the Paris School of Economics, a master's degree in



Mr Paseka Lesolang is the Chief Executive Officer of Water Hygiene Convenience (WHC). Paseka is a passionate advocate for job creation and environmental sustainability, with a particular focus on water security. Through his company, WHC, he has created over 30 jobs and saved more than 120 million litres of water to date through community-based projects. Paseka completed a course in Advanced Entrepreneurship and Business Management at the University of Pretoria and is currently pursuing a BCom in Business Management at the University of South Africa. As a water and energy-efficiency practitioner, he has also completed specialised training in Water and Energy Efficiency Management, Carbon Footprint Analysis, and Sustainable and Efficient Facilities Management at the Terra Firma Academy. His dedication and impact have earned him global recognition. He was selected as one of 25 High-Impact Entrepreneurs worldwide by the Unreasonable Institute, participating in an accelerated MBA programme at the University of Colorado in the United States of America. Additionally, he was one of only three Africans chosen by the Resilient Africa Network to attend an Innovation Course at Stanford University in the United States of America. He also completed a Project Management course at the IE Business School in Madrid, Spain.



Prof Mauricio Rodas served as the Mayor of Quito, Ecuador, from 2014 to 2019. During his tenure, he successfully led the construction of the country's first metro line and implemented numerous initiatives to promote urban sustainability, social equity and economic development. He hosted the United Nations Conference on Urban Sustainable Development – Habitat III and held prominent international positions in the main city networks, such as World Co-President of UCLG, Vice-Chair of C40 Cities, and board member of the Global Covenant of Mayors and ICLEI. Currently, he is a Visiting Professor at the University of Pennsylvania, lecturing on cities climate-resilient infrastructure finance, Senior Advisor on Extreme Heat and City Diplomacy at the Atlantic Council Resilient Center, leading the “City Champions for Heat Action” initiative, and member of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Public Administration.



Prof Geci Karuri-Sebina is a scholar-practitioner who works in the intersection between people, place, time and technological change. She currently serves as an Associate Professor of digital governance at the University of the Witwatersrand School of Governance where she leads the Tayarisha Centre for Digital Governance and coordinates the Civic Tech Innovation Network. Geci has recently co-edited two seminal

volumes on digital governance in Africa, namely *Digitalisation and Public Policy in Africa: GovTech and CivicTech Innovations* (2025, Palgrave Macmillan) and *Africa's Digital Transformation and its Governance* (forthcoming, African Minds/Leuven University). She is based in Johannesburg.

For further information about this webinar, please contact:

Ms Pearl Maponya – pearlmap3@tshwane.gov.za and

Ms Wilheminah Chueu – wilheminahc@tshwane.gov.za

7. Programme

Facilitator: Mr Khulekani Mathe		
Time slot	Item	Role
5 minutes	Welcome remarks	Cllr Nasiphi Moya Executive Mayor of the City of Tshwane and U20 Co-chair City of Tshwane, South Africa
5 minutes	Introduction and scene setting	Mr Khulekani Mathe Chief Executive Officer: Business Unity South Africa (BUSA)
15 minutes	Panellist 1: Global perspective The role of development finance institutions in bulk infrastructure investment to unlock urban economic growth	Ms Camille Viros Head: Inclusive Growth in Cities, OECD
15 minutes	Panellist 2: African perspective Support mechanisms required to drive inclusive economic growth: The case of a young entrepreneur from Ga-Rankuwa township in Pretoria, South Africa	Mr Paseka Lesolang Chief Executive Officer: Water Hygiene Convenience (WHC), South Africa
15 minutes	Panellist 3: South American perspective Policy interventions to support sustainable and inclusive economic growth – what do cities need from national governments?	Prof Mauricio Rodas Former Mayor: Quito, Ecuador Visiting Professor University of Pennsylvania
30 minutes	Facilitated panel discussion	Facilitator
5 minutes	Summary - Chart the common urban city agenda	Prof Geci Karuri-Sebina University of the Witwatersrand South Africa