

# Putting Development at the Centre of G20 Policy Agenda: Lessons for the T20



by Daniele Fattibene and Alice Fill

## ABSTRACT

The G20 Development Working Group has gradually evolved throughout the years, following a haphazard and contradictory path. On the one hand, it has been progressively overshadowed by a sectoralisation of G20 activities, with several action tracks (i.e., the Finance Track) taking a more prominent role in the definition of the leaders' priorities. On the other hand, its (unexploited) potential has increased due to the emergence of several global crises that have shown the importance of rekindling multilateral solutions at the G20 level. The T20 has a strong potential to boost G20 legitimacy on development cooperation worldwide, by drafting evidence-based and pragmatic policy proposals for the decision-makers. However, although often advocating for similar solutions, the Development Working Group and T20 have not necessarily fed into each other's policy agendas, leading to misalignment and reducing their chances to influence other G20 tracks on crucial development issues such as development finance, food security or the global climate agenda.

*G20 | Summits | T20 | Sustainable development*

**keywords**

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by Daniele Fattibene and Alice Fill\*

## Introduction

Over the last years, the G20 has progressively gained in importance as a key global setting for multilateral cooperation on issues such as international finance, infrastructural development, food and nutrition security, and health cooperation. Originally framed as an informal summit of the most industrialised countries, since the 2008 financial crisis it has been elevated to summit level, gradually broadening its reach to, amongst other things, development.

The launch of the G20 Development Working Group (DWG) in Seoul in 2010 marked the formal integration of development issues into the G20 policy agenda, with the publication of a multi-year action plan.<sup>1</sup> However, the DWG has followed a haphazard and contradictory path. On the one hand, it has been progressively overshadowed by a sectoralisation of G20 activities, with several action tracks (i.e., first and foremost the Finance Track) taking a more prominent role in the definition of the leaders' priorities. On the other hand, its (unexploited) potential has increased due to the emergence of several global crises that have shown the importance of rekindling multilateral solutions at the G20 level.

Due to its cross-cutting nature, the DWG has the capacity to promote a horizontal approach to broader development issues, breaking policy silos. The DWG has increasingly worked with other key actors that aim to support and guide the work of the G20, such as the eight official G20 engagement groups – the Business20, Civil20, Labour20, Science20, Think20 (T20), Urban20, Women20 and Youth20.

<sup>1</sup> G20, *Seoul Summit Document Annex II: Multi-year Action Plan on Development*, 12 November 2010, <http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/2010/g20seoul-development.html>.

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The T20, consisting of G20-based think tanks and created in 2012 under the Mexican Presidency, has been the most vocal in the development field. The T20 is considered as a “G20 Bank of Ideas” that tries to influence the political leaders’ agendas through a global network of independent experts and knowledge centres. Yet, although often advocating for similar solutions, the DWG and T20 have not necessarily fed into each other’s policy agendas, leading to misalignment and reducing their chances to influence other G20 tracks on crucial development issues such as development finance, food security or the global climate agenda.

## 1. The evolution of the DWG: Lessons from the Italian G20 Presidency

### 1.1 Addressing structural weaknesses

Throughout the years, the DWG has faced a series of structural challenges that have hampered its impact on development-related issues.<sup>2</sup> First, institutional rivalry and tensions with other G20 tracks – in particular with the Finance Track – and at different levels of ministerial representation within the DWG have hampered decision-making in the G20 development agenda. As an example, most of the G20 countries lack dedicated ministries for development policy. This is a legacy from the historical (and today post-colonial) division between North/South or “donors/recipients”, whereby in developing countries responsibility for managing international aid fell on Finance Ministries. While we are slowly moving away from this dichotomy, institutional set-ups do not yet reflect such changes. This has frequently led to diverging approaches in the DWG, thus hindering effective decision-making as many Sherpas were not formally mandated to take decisions during the meetings.<sup>3</sup>

Second, the persistent lack of a common understanding of what sustainability means has made it very complicated to reach consensus on key topics such as the climate agenda. In fact, almost seven years after the adoption of the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the G20 still lacks a shared vision on how to ensure the transition towards zero-carbon societies. In 2021, growing tensions emerged with regard to climate change and biodiversity protection around the “right to pollute” as opposed to sustainable transitions based on climate change mitigation and adaptation. While for the first time the G20 Rome Summit underlined the importance of staying below 1.5°C, the next G20 Presidencies face the challenge of overcoming the ambiguous positions held by countries such as India and Brazil. Some G20 members are trying to water down

<sup>2</sup> Daniele Fattibene, Elisabeth Hege and Niels Keijzer, “Supporting Developing Countries for a Global Sustainable Recovery: Lessons from the Italian G20 Presidency”, in *IDDDRI Blog*, 15 October 2021, <https://www.idddri.org/en/node/26368>.

<sup>3</sup> Interview, 30 August 2021.

climate ambitions and this attitude means potentially missing out on future low-carbon market opportunities. G20 members should make a clear long-term offer of financial and technical support towards low-carbon recovery pathways and long-term strategies.<sup>4</sup> During the climate negotiations in Glasgow, it was clear that climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies are still perceived by certain countries (Brazil, China, India) as a new form of conditionality, triggering new and old geopolitical forms of ideological resistance, thus making it hard to find a common ground and language.<sup>5</sup>

Third, the lack of adequate access to DWG exchanges and the corresponding lack of agency of developing countries – and particularly least developed countries (LDCs) – has affected the G20's credibility.<sup>6</sup> The insufficient progress in increasing Official Development Assistance (ODA) to LDCs has only been worsened by covid-19. Preliminary data show that net bilateral aid flows from Development Assistance Committee (DAC) members to LDCs amounted to 34 billion US dollars in 2020, just 1.8 per cent more than in 2019 in real terms.<sup>7</sup> These figures present a contradiction to the G20's claim on addressing as a priority the support to sustainable recovery in developing countries.

Last but not least, the G20's development effectiveness has been reduced by the lack of consistency between the policy agenda of successive Presidencies, as well as by the fact that in the current set-up there is not enough political capital to focus on comprehensive development plans. In addition, G20 Presidencies have progressively abandoned multi-year programming and have not effectively involved the eight official G20 engagement groups in determining their Presidency priorities. This has resulted in abandoned initiatives and has been a major source of frustration, especially among the civil society or the research communities.

## 1.2 The Italian recipe for revitalising the DWG

The Italian G20 Presidency has tried to address some of these challenges. For instance, the Presidency has put issues as debt relief and sustainable financing – traditionally considered prerogatives of the G20 Finance Track – at the core of the DWG's agenda. A promising innovation of the Italian Presidency was to organise joint sessions between the DWG and the re-established Sustainable Finance Working Group,<sup>8</sup> within the Finance Track, to promote stronger dialogue and

<sup>4</sup> Steffen Bauer, "The Proof of the Haggis: Making Sense of the Glasgow Climate Change Conference", in *DIE Blog*, 24 November 2021, <https://blogs.die-gdi.de/?p=14359>.

<sup>5</sup> Interview, 30 August 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Sidiropoulos, "Boosting Africa's and LDCs' Agency in the G20", in *IAI Papers*, No. 21|48 (October 2021), <https://www.iai.it/en/node/14267>.

<sup>7</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *COVID-19 Spending Helped to Lift Foreign Aid to an All-Time High in 2020. Detailed Note*, 13 April 2021, <https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-data/ODA-2020-detailed-summary.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> G20, *G20 Sustainable Finance Working Group. 2021 Synthesis Report*, 7 October 2021, [https://g20sfwg.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Synth\\_G20\\_Final.pdf](https://g20sfwg.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Synth_G20_Final.pdf).

policy coherence. Such an increased intra-institutional cooperation between the DWG and the Finance Track has also been evident during the second edition of the Finance in Common Summit held in Rome in October 2021, where relevant attention was shed on the role of the G20 as a promoter of a sustainability shift in the financial system.<sup>9</sup>

The release of the package on Financing for Sustainable Development has been an important achievement in terms of including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) within the G20 members' Integrated National Financial Frameworks. The Italian G20 Presidency has also tried to create consensus around a common vision of the G20 on fiscal space for alignment of SDGs, which is a crucial step to assess how public expenditures can fully integrate the sustainability criteria within budgetary decisions.<sup>10</sup>

Fully integrating the DWG and the Finance Track agendas has proved hard also under the Italian G20 Presidency. In fact, finance and development ministries still speak a different language and this distance constantly ends up blocking development-related initiatives, as Finance Ministries still have little knowledge of what SDG alignment really means. To avoid a similar impasse, the Italian G20 Presidency has tried to de-emphasise the link between SDG alignment and the sole decarbonisation and green agenda, focusing instead on SDGs' interconnectedness.<sup>11</sup>

In addition, the DWG has addressed several key issues for LDCs. These included the extension of the Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI), the Common Framework beyond the DSSI, but also the debate on the effective re-allocation of the Special Drawing Rights (SDRs)<sup>12</sup> aiming at promoting a sustainable post-covid recovery while increasing LDCs and African ownership and agency.

In view of the LDCs' enormous sustainable investment needs, mobilising private financial resources is both crucial and inescapable.<sup>13</sup> Blended finance could represent an important instrument in terms of combining ODA with private

<sup>9</sup> Finance in Common Summit (FiCS), *Communiqué: Progress and New Directions for the Public Development Banks Coalition and Its Stakeholders*, Rome, 20 October 2021, <https://financeincommon.org/communique-2021-finance-in-common-summit-fics>.

<sup>10</sup> Interview, 1 December 2021.

<sup>11</sup> Interview, 30 August 2021.

<sup>12</sup> The SDR is an international reserve asset, created by the IMF in 1969 to supplement its member countries' official reserves. SDR allocations can play a role in providing liquidity and supplementing member countries' official reserves, as was the case amid the global financial crisis. To date, a total of SDR 660.7 billion (equivalent to about 943 billion US dollars) has been allocated. This includes the largest-ever allocation of about SDR 456 billion approved on 2 August 2021 (effective on 23 August 2021). This most recent allocation was to address the long-term global need for reserves, and help countries cope with the impact of the covid-19 pandemic. Please cf. International Monetary Fund (IMF), "Special Drawing Rights (SDR)", in *IMF Factsheets*, 5 August 2021, <https://www.imf.org/en/About/Factsheets/Sheets/2016/08/01/14/51/Special-Drawing-Right-SDR>.

<sup>13</sup> United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), *Launch of the Liquidity and Sustainability Facility*, 3 November 2021, <https://uneca.org/node/4061>.

finance, thereby leveraging scarce concessional public financial resources.<sup>14</sup> So far, private capital does not flow to LDCs for different reasons (e.g., bad governance, lack of institutional capacity, political instability), hence the G20 has an important role in developing institutional capacity to effectively implement blended finance tools and to lower risks, drawing on the experience of the OECD Blended Finance Principles.<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, for the first time since 2010, the Italian Presidency organised a dedicated Development Ministerial meeting in June 2021, leading to several important results such as the Matera Declaration on food security, nutrition and food systems.<sup>16</sup> These development policy deliberations constitute an important step to ensure accountability among the leaders and national bureaucracies.

Finally, the 2021 G20 Presidency has promoted a stronger involvement of the engagement groups in the production of the G20 development deliverables.<sup>17</sup> In 2021 there was a significant demand from the DWG to engage with the T20 in several meetings, although with mixed results. While G20 negotiators acknowledge that there is a huge opportunity for think tanks to influence individual delegations, it was noted that T20 was far less relevant in informing and influencing DWG deliverables than expected, mainly due to different timing and lack of coordination between the G20 and the T20 agendas.<sup>18</sup>

## 2. The role of engagement groups for G20 Presidencies

The aforementioned eight official G20 engagement groups have been increasingly involved in the G20 Presidencies' working agendas. They have served as platforms to accompany decision-makers in the identification and implementation of policy priorities. The benefits of involving such groups in the G20 decision-making process are obvious and proceed mutually in both directions: non-governmental actors have a recognised forum to which they can put forward ideas and proposals; at the same time, the engagement groups ensure valuable support for the work of the G20, not only by providing specific expertise and different perspectives but also by ensuring greater legitimacy,<sup>19</sup> an issue that is not to be underestimated in a

<sup>14</sup> Kathrin Berensmann, "How Can the G20 Support Innovative Mechanisms to Mobilise Financial Resources for LDCs in a Post-Pandemic World?", in *IAI Papers*, No. 21|49 (October 2021), <https://www.iai.it/en/node/14269>.

<sup>15</sup> OECD, *OECD DAC Blended Finance Principles for Unlocking Commercial Finance for the Sustainable Development Goals*, Paris, OECD Publishing, 2018, <https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-topics/OECD-Blended-Finance-Principles.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> G20, *Matera Declaration on Food Security, Nutrition and Food Systems. A Call to Action in the Time of the Covid-19 Pandemic and Beyond*, 29 June 2021, <http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/2021/210629-matera-declaration.html>.

<sup>17</sup> Interview, 30 August 2021.

<sup>18</sup> Interview, 28 October 2021.

<sup>19</sup> Ronja Scheler and Hugo Dobson, "Joining Forces: Reviving Multilateralism through Multi-

context of persistent global crises.<sup>20</sup>

The T20 provides a particularly suitable case study to assess the ways in which research can – or cannot – be channelled into global policy processes. The declared aim of the T20 is indeed to feed expert knowledge and research more systematically into the G20 agenda, bringing together growing networks of international organisations, research institutes and think tanks working toward the promotion of sound and evidence-based advice.

Since its inception, the nature and ambitions of the T20 have profoundly evolved, and while in the early days the engagement groups' contributions were considered as a kind of "intellectual ornamentation", since 2018 specific task forces have been established to prepare policy recommendations designed to overlap and effectively shape the G20 political process.<sup>21</sup> Each of the T20 task forces focuses on a key topic addressed by the summit and aims at producing a series of policy briefs with recommendations for G20 leaders. Some of these recommendations end up in the final T20 Communiqué, issued on the occasion of the T20 final summit. This has turned the T20 into a credible source of expert global policy advice, able not only to promote solutions to global problems, but also to steer and influence global governance<sup>22</sup> through a global community of thinkers and organisations.<sup>23</sup>

### 2.1 Weighing the alignment of T20 with the G20 agendas

Tracing the work of the T20 to the G20 development agendas is not easy. Existing studies have tried to assess how the T20 has managed to achieve a concrete impact in terms of policy recommendations<sup>24</sup> and political statements. The large majority of the analyses draw on a specific methodology designed by the University of Toronto's "Global Governance Program for the Recommendations Realized" reports.<sup>25</sup> Such a methodology provides a framework for identifying the impact of the T20 policy recommendations on the official documents produced during the G20 summits, examining in particular the final Leaders' Declarations. To make this impact quantifiable, some studies suggest giving each policy proposal identified by the T20 a score on a three-point scale, depending on the match observed with the

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Stakeholder Cooperation", in *T20 Saudi Arabia Policy Briefs*, September 2020, p. 8, <https://www.g20-insights.org/?p=15878>.

<sup>20</sup> Leslie A. Pal and Jennifer Spence, "Defending the Realm: Knowledge Networks, Regime Maintenance and Policy Transfer", in Osmany Porto de Oliveira (ed.), *Handbook of Policy Transfer, Diffusion and Circulation*, Cheltenham/Northampton, Edward Elgar, 2020, p. 237-256.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Brittaney Warren and John Kirton, "Recommendations Realized: From T20 to G20 2018", in *G20 Information Centre Analysis*, 12 March 2019, <http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/analysis/t20-2018-recommendations-realized.html>.

<sup>23</sup> Leslie A. Pal and Jennifer Spence, "Defending the Realm", cit.

<sup>24</sup> Axel Berger and Sven Grimm, "The T20 Has Come a Long Way – Now It Needs to Take the Next Step", in *DIE Blog*, 18 November 2020, <https://blogs.die-gdi.de/?p=12487>.

<sup>25</sup> See John Kirton, "Strengthening T20 Influence", in *G20 Information Centre Analysis*, 15 December 2021, <http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/analysis/211215-kirton-strengthening-t20-influence.html>.

final Declarations. A score of –1 indicates no match with the final commitments, a score of 0 indicates partial match (only one or some of the components of the recommendation are realised in any number of commitments), and a score of +1 indicates full match (all components of that recommendation are reflected in at least one commitment).<sup>26</sup> Similarly, other studies have assessed the impact of other engagement groups on the G20 final declarations, such as the Women20. These studies have highlighted that Women20 has increased the number of G20 leaders' commitments on gender issues: in fact, over the last six years, compliance with the core gender commitments has risen from 55 to 66 per cent.

Adopting similar methods of analysis, other authors have assessed the Argentinian and Japanese G20 Presidencies, trying to evaluate the impact of T20 recommendations in the final G20 Declarations. These studies show that in the case of the Argentinian G20 Presidency around one quarter (24 per cent) of the 135 T20 recommendations<sup>27</sup> were either partially or fully matched in the Buenos Aires G20 commitment. Of these, 11 recommendations specifically concerned sustainable development; four focused on development finance; and seven recommendations were taken up in G20 progress reports on the UN's 2030 Agenda.<sup>28</sup> Following the same approach, Tops and Hou contend that 46 per cent of the 108 T20 recommendations were either partially or fully reflected in the G20 Declaration under the Japanese Presidency, a substantial increase from Buenos Aires.<sup>29</sup>

It is important to note that the T20 does not have a fixed structure, as each T20 Chair is free to decide the number and the topics on which the global community of experts will concentrate each year. This is particularly relevant for sustainability issues, as it poses important questions on continuity of the T20's agenda. In fact, not all of the recommendations addressing the Agenda 2030 or other development issues have been drafted within an *ad hoc* Task Forces organised by the different T20 Presidencies. Nevertheless, the eventual limited scope of dedicated Task Forces does not affect the relevance of the present analysis. Sustainable development includes by definition crosscutting issues that span all multilateral agendas: hence, limiting the scope of the analysis to the recommendations proposed by the Task Forces with a specific focus on the topic risks being partial.

The methodology followed in this paper comprises a two-step process.<sup>30</sup> First, the policy recommendations covered by T20 policy briefs on international

<sup>26</sup> Julia Tops and Angela Min Yi Hou, "T20 Recommendations Realized: 2019 Osaka Summit", in *G20 Information Centre Analysis*, 7 March 2020, <http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/analysis/t20-2019-recommendations-realized.html>.

<sup>27</sup> Brittaney Warren and John Kirton, "Recommendations Realized: From T20 to G20 2018", cit.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Julia Tops and Angela Min Yi Hou, "T20 Recommendations Realized: 2019 Osaka Summit", cit.

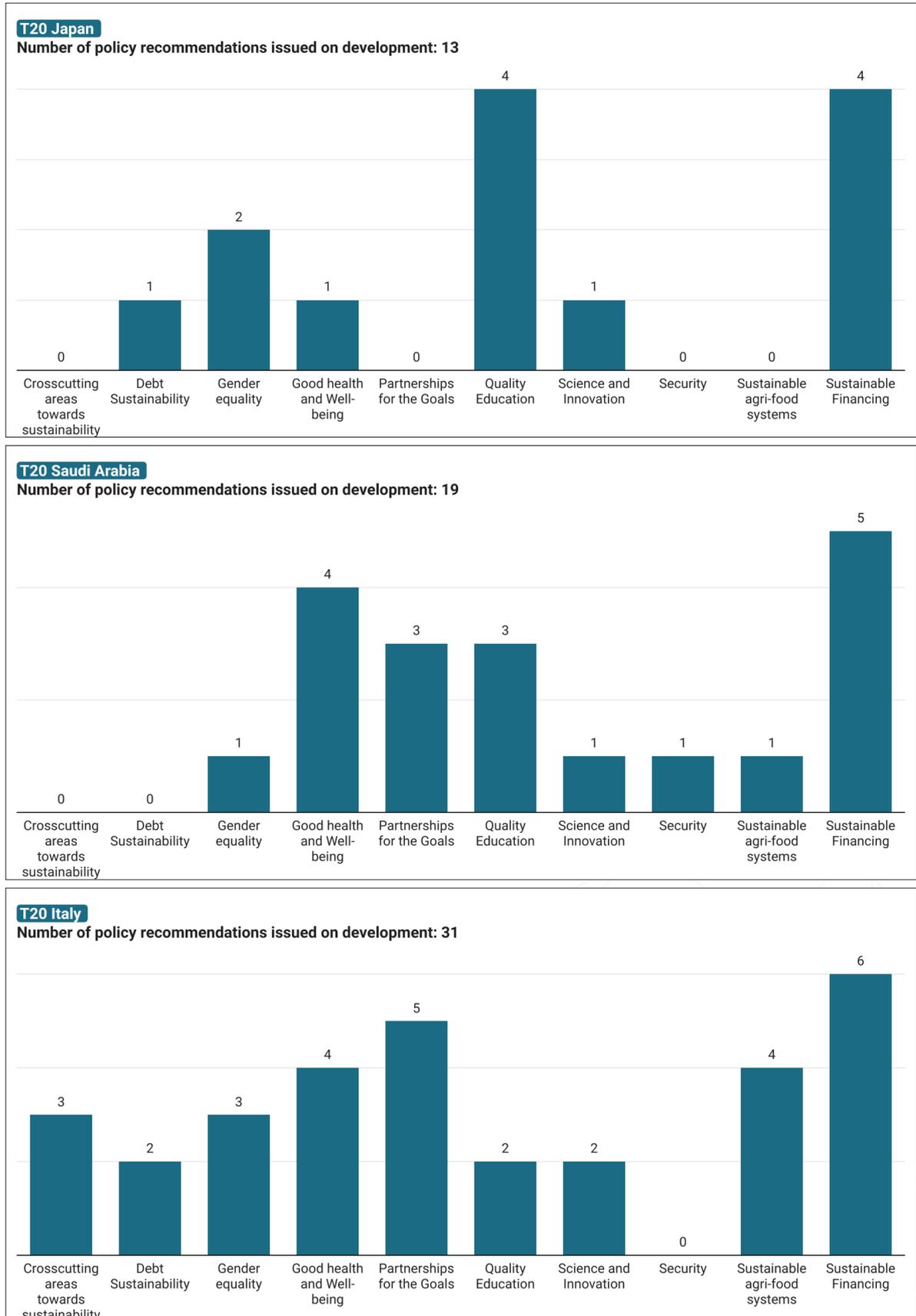
<sup>30</sup> The authors are aware that having an influence on the text of a declaration does not necessarily lead to a real impact on policy change, thus this analysis focuses mostly on how T20 recommendations have been trickling down to the recommendations of the G20 DWG.

development published under the Japanese, the Saudi and the Italian Presidencies were identified. This made it possible to set up a database collecting the titles and topics addressed by the different policy recommendations produced by all Task Forces. After screening them one by one, the relevant recommendations for the analysis on development issues were identified. This process allowed for the selected recommendations to be grouped in ten thematic clusters:

1. Crosscutting areas towards sustainability,
2. Debt sustainability,
3. Gender equality,
4. Good health and well-being,
5. Partnerships for the goals,
6. Quality education,
7. Security,
8. Science and innovation,
9. Sustainable agri-food systems, and
10. Sustainable financing.

The analysis compared the Final T20 Communiqué with the G20 Final Declarations, to verify to what extent the T20 indications – issued before the final G20 Summit – were actually addressed by the G20 leaders, distinguishing between recommendations that were “fully addressed”, “partially addressed” or “not addressed”. In line with the methodology developed by the University of Toronto’s report, a T20 recommendation is considered “fully addressed” if each of its components matches at least one commitment undertaken by the G20 Final Declaration. If only one or some components are included in the Final Declaration, the recommendation is considered “partially addressed”. On the contrary, if either no match can be found between the recommendation and the Final Declaration or if the core focus of the recommendation is not addressed, the latter is labelled as “not addressed”.

**Figure 1** | Policy briefs on development-related issues produced by T20 Task Forces



## *2.2 Driving the international policy agenda? A comparative assessment of T20 Japan, T20 Saudi Arabia and T20 Italy*

Looking at the policy recommendations produced by the different policy briefs, we can draw three main conclusions. First, development issues have progressively consolidated their position within the T20 policy agenda, with a steadily increasing number of policy briefs addressing the topic. While in 2019 the various T20 Task Forces issued 13 policy briefs on development, in 2020 this number rose to 19 under the Saudi Presidency and to 31 in 2021 under the Italian Presidency. In this sense, it is interesting to highlight that during the Japanese T20 Presidency development issues were addressed in only three Task Forces, of which Task Force Number 1 was specifically dedicated to Agenda 2030. In the case of T20 Saudi Arabia, development was addressed across the board in the work of seven Task Forces, of which Number 7 was dedicated to G20 support for the SDGs and Development. Finally, in T20 Italy six Task Forces addressed different dimensions of the sustainability agenda, and one of them (Task Force 5) was entirely dedicated to Agenda 2030.

Second, the promotion of sustainable financing was a common denominator across the three T20 processes, although in a more limited fashion under the T20 Japan. This reflects how crucial it has become for G20 members to identify ways in which public and private actors can provide resources to fully implement the targets set in Agenda 2030. In this sense, it is important to notice that the T20 Indonesia dedicates one Task Force to SDG Financing, focusing on a series of topics such as establishing a G20 framework for blended SDG financing, engaging the private sector on innovative financing mechanisms including in Environmental, Social and Governance strategies, and strengthening the role of Public Development Banks and Multilateral Development Banks in supporting SDG financing for developing countries.

Third, the last T20 agenda was affected by the covid-19 pandemic. Hence, it does not come as a surprise that compared to 2019, the recommendations issued both for the Riyadh and the Rome summits put a special focus on health, largely due to the need to respond to the pandemic crisis. In addition, the 2021 T20 Final Communiqué also paid much attention to partnerships for creating sustainable agri-food systems and debt sustainability. On the other hand, the relevance devoted to the role of education in relation to development seems to be declining.

## *2.3 Matching T20 Communiqué with G20 Final Declarations*

Considering the final conclusions on development-related issues rolled out by the T20 and G20, some key observations can be made. First, it appears that the G20 in Osaka was more receptive to the considerations on development raised by the T20, compared to the Riyadh summit: in 2019, 30 per cent (8 out of 26) of the Communiqué recommendations on development were fully addressed in the Final Declarations. The following year, this was the case for only 15 per cent (3 out of

20) of the recommendations. At the Rome summit, there was a slight rebound in the number of policy recommendations on development fully addressed by the G20, accounting for 18 per cent of the recommendations presented in the Final Communiqué (5 out of 28).

Second, at the Osaka summit, 30 per cent of the recommendations were partially addressed, while 38 per cent were not addressed. In Riyadh, 45 per cent of the recommendations were partially addressed and 40 per cent not addressed. In Rome, the policy recommendations partially addressed amounted to 46 per cent, while those not addressed to accounted for 35 per cent.

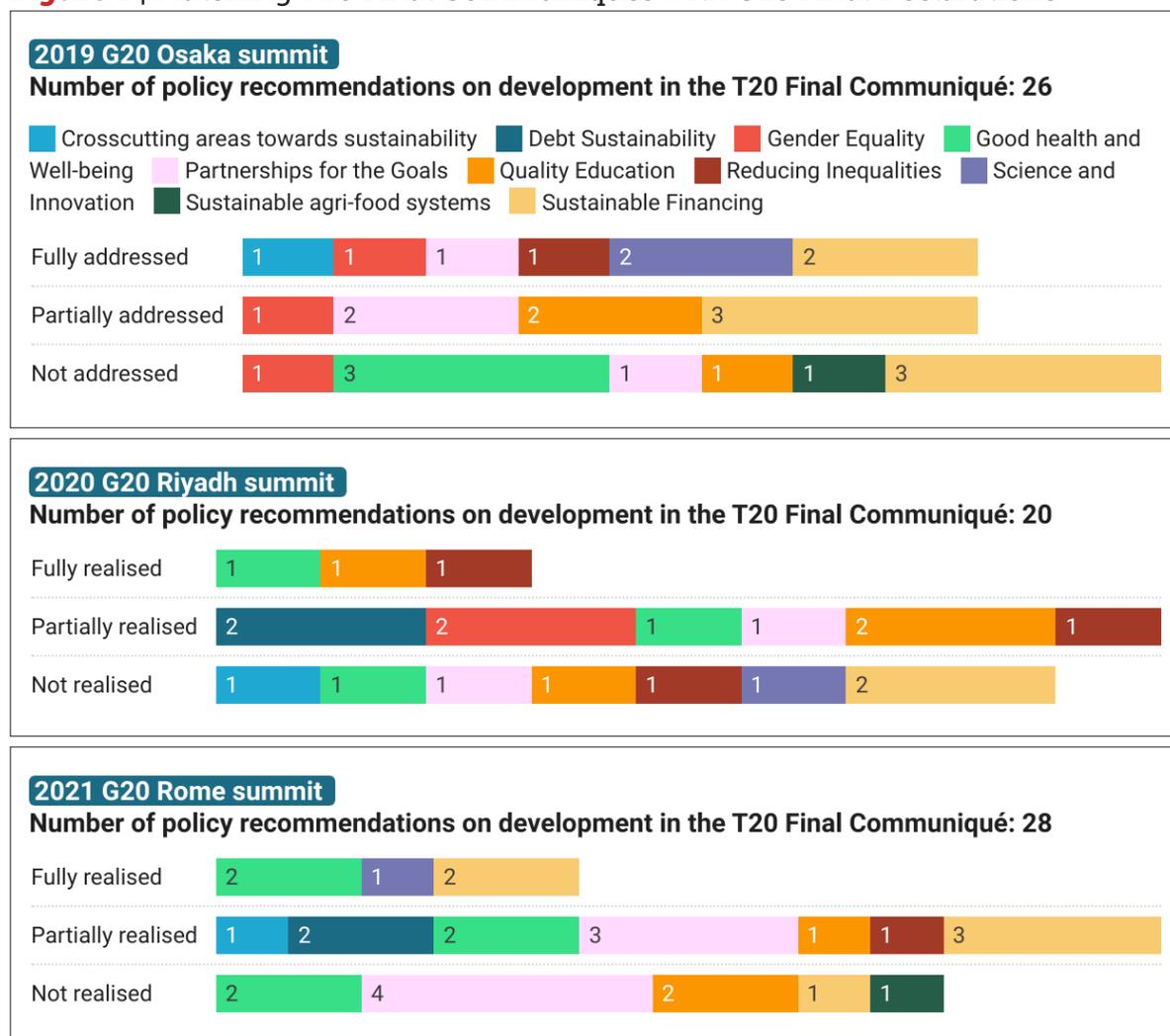
Third, there was a greater convergence between T20 and G20 final recommendations on health issues in 2020 and 2021 than in 2019. This was caused by the outbreak of the covid-19 pandemic, which ensured great alignment between the demands of researchers and policy makers.

Fourth, both the Japanese and the Italian G20 Final Declarations put a strong emphasis on sustainable financing, a topic that remained largely unaddressed during the Riyadh summit – where, moreover, there was limited input on the subject even from the T20.

Finally, it can be assessed that the importance given to quality education and gender equality in relation to development goals remains relatively limited, in particular with regards to the policy recommendations issued in the Rome summit.

The graphs below (Figure 2) visualise how recommendations on development issued in the Final Communiqué of the various T20s were actually addressed by the G20 Final Declarations. In particular, the graph shows – on the basis of ten thematic clusters – whether the various T20 recommendations have been fully addressed, partially addressed or not addressed by the G20 final commitments.

**Figure 2** | Matching T20 Final Communiqués with G20 Final Declarations



Source: Authors' elaboration.

### 3. How can the T20 more strongly impact the G20 development cooperation policy agenda?

The T20 has gradually cast itself as a respectful forum to address the most crucial development challenges affecting the multilateral system. However, there is still a huge potential to improve the T20's capacity to have real impact on G20 policy processes.

The most important priority is to ensure stronger coherence and alignment between the T20 agenda and the one followed by the different G20 Working Groups. For instance, in the case of development issues, it would be essential to ensure that T20 priorities and timing are well aligned with the activities (e.g., Ministerial Meetings on development cooperation, DWG meetings, etc.) and the deliverables produced

by the DWG. A persistent lack of coordination would make the T20 irrelevant and incapable of producing concrete proposals that could be shared with the Sherpas. Therefore, the T20 should work closely with the national Sherpas and Delegations and support them throughout the whole drafting process. It is possible to draw three main policy recommendations that would make the T20 be more impactful.

First, the T20 should keep advocating for a better representation and agency of other actors from the developing world – particularly African – that are at the centre of some crucial G20 deliberations, but are still excluded from the decision-making processes. The fact that the next three G20 Presidencies will be held by non-Western countries like Indonesia, India and Brazil provides an historic opportunity to bring the voice of the developing world more systematically within the G20 decision-making processes.

Second, as development is something that takes place in the medium-to-long term, the T20 should push for a return to multi-year planning at the G20 level. While this will not prevent single G20 Presidencies from pursuing their own national agendas and deliverables, multi-year programming would allow for more durable legacy, continuity and policy coherence across various Presidencies on key long-term issues such as the climate agenda.

Third, the T20 should support the DWG in identifying better strategies to avoid the institutional rivalries with the Finance Track, while providing effective metrics to national finance bureaucracies to properly monitor the full integration of sustainability principles and targets in budgetary decisions. This will be crucial to achieve some of the goals set for instance in the field of development finance, where some initiatives like the Common Framework beyond the DSSI are doomed to fail without a full engagement of private actors in supporting debt relief of the most vulnerable countries. This also applies to the creation of common rules on how to mobilise blended finance to support financing for sustainable development or how to effectively re-allocate SDRs to serve the purpose of SDG alignment.

In conclusion, the T20 has a strong potential to boost G20 legitimacy on development cooperation worldwide, by drafting evidence-based and pragmatic policy proposals for the decision makers. The G20 is indeed at a crossroads: while it was a legitimate creation during the 2008 financial crisis, its credibility should now be based on the ambition of reinventing a sustainable, inclusive and low-carbon global economy, in close cooperation with other multilateral fora and institutions. The risk is that what once represented an institutional innovation respected for its crisis response capacity may turn into a part of the problem, and will not be able to be a powerful engine for advancing towards global sustainable development.

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