SUMMARY REPORT

Asia Civil Society Strategy Convening

Influencing the Republic of Korea's 2028 G20 Presidency



Participants at the convening, Dusit D2 Samyan, Bangkok

10–11 October 2026 · Bangkok, Thailand

Convened by Oxfam and the C20 Korea Platform

Executive summary

On 10–11 October 2026, Oxfam and the C20 Korea[1] Platform brought 42 civil society participants from 16 countries to Bangkok to start building a shared strategy for influencing the Republic of Korea's 2028 G20 Presidency. Twelve participants came from Korea, 22 from 11 other Asian countries and eight from the UK, US, South Africa and Kenya. The meeting was timed for the eve of the World Bank–IMF Annual Meetings, which opened in Bangkok on 12 October.

The convening moved from learning to commitment. Participants first drew lessons from the three most recent and upcoming G20 presidencies (South Africa in 2025, the United States in 2026 and the United Kingdom in 2027), then examined Korea's political context and its claim to be a "bridge country" between the Global North and South. From that shared understanding they set priorities, mapped who needs to be influenced, and drafted the first country and regional action plans.

Outcome in brief. Participants agreed six coalition themes and voted on 18 priority asks (three per theme). They mapped the stakeholders to influence, produced first action plans from India, Indonesia, Korea and a regional group, and agreed in principle to form a core group of about five people to keep the work moving. The single most important message is that the window to shape Korea's agenda is 2026–2027, not 2028.

Purpose and context

The convening responded to a narrowing of civic space at the G20. The 2026 US presidency has recognised only the Business 20 as an official engagement group, cut its working groups from around 25 to four, and sidelined the Civil 20 (C20). Korea offers a different opening: it hosted the G20 in 2010, when Asian civil society helped shape the Seoul Development Consensus and seeded the C20, and its current government describes the country as a bridge between developed and developing nations.

KEY POINT

42 participants from 16 countries, guided by an 11-member Steering Committee from nine countries.

Timing drives the strategy. Most of a G20 leaders' declaration is negotiated at sherpa and finance-track level long before the summit, so Korea's 2028 priorities are being shaped now. The meeting therefore set out to build lasting partnerships between Korean and wider Asian civil society, learn from the troika and ensure continuity across presidencies, and develop a shared agenda on inequality, development finance, debt, tax and AI governance. It also aimed to craft common messages so that Korea plays a genuine bridge role for Asia and the Global South, and to carry the work into a Seoul convening in 2027.

The two days were facilitated by Anoop Sukumaran using participatory methods, including World Café, fishbowl discussion, power mapping and dot voting, with speaker inputs capped at ten minutes so that most of the time was spent in deliberation.

[1] In this document, "Korea" is used for brevity and refers to the Republic of Korea.

Lessons from recent presidencies

> **IN THEIR WORDS**
>
> **“Continuity is not automatic.”**
>
> *— Troika lesson from South Africa's 2025 presidency*

South Africa's 2025 presidency showed that lasting gains come from institutions rather than statements. Oxfam South Africa's Amir Bagherioromi described how an expert committee on global inequality, chaired by Joseph Stiglitz, became a proposal for a standing International Panel on Inequality (IPI) designed to outlive the presidency. South Africa also secured an African Union-owned mechanism in the finance track, with a mandate running to 2030. A "People's G20" roadshow took the summit's issues to mining, farming and urban communities across the country.

The same experience exposed weaknesses that Korea 2028 must avoid. Planning started too late, when it should begin two to three years ahead. The finance track scored lowest of all tracks on civic access, and the civil society debt letter arrived only after the finance agenda had been locked. Most recommendations could not be traced from submission to final text, and many communities never learned what became of the evidence they gave, which risks making participation feel extractive. South Africa was also largely excluded from 2026 planning, a reminder that troika handover cannot be assumed.

The US presidency illustrates how quickly space can close. Charlotte Friar of Oxfam US described an agenda narrowed to trade, deregulation, energy and AI, with development, financial architecture and women's working groups dropped and South Africa left off invitation lists. Civil society responded with a domestic "Big Tent" alliance linking labour, women's and civil society groups, parallel pressure through other G20 capitals, engagement with Congress and a planned counter-summit with labour allies. The lesson drawn was that defensive, light-touch engagement is not enough; civil society needs an ambitious alternative agenda.

The UK presidency in 2027 is the bridge to Korea. Maria Finnerty (Bond) and Jean Mclean (Oxfam GB) presented a "Fix the system" coalition campaign that reframes aid as solidarity against a broken financial system. Its priorities are debt relief, including reform of the G20 Common Framework and a UK law to stop private creditors suing debt-distressed countries in London courts, fairer and wealth-based taxation, and an end to illicit financial flows. Public moments are planned for January, June and the November summit in Manchester.

Working in six groups, participants distilled these experiences into guidance for Korea. They would keep cross-country coordination, broad coalitions with labour, women's and youth groups, timely interventions and post-summit tracking of commitments. They would avoid long, unprioritised wish lists, fragmented demands, late planning, neglect of the finance track and top-heavy processes that exclude grassroots movements. New ideas to try included framing macro-policy around the cost of living, drawing on Korea's own 1997 IMF crisis to build empathy on debt, and opening doors through care and youth issues before pressing structural debt and tax reform.

A recurring dilemma was whether engaging the G20 legitimises an exclusive and unaccountable forum. Participants recalled India's 2023 presidency, when civil society was placed under surveillance and sidelined by a state-run C20. The response proposed was to engage while making delivery on debt and financial-architecture reform the test of the G20's legitimacy.

The Republic of Korea as a bridge country

> IN THEIR WORDS
>
> **“A bridge is built before the crossing is needed.”**
>
> *— Amir Bagherioromi, Oxfam South Africa*

A seat at the table does not guarantee influence, and bridge-building carries political costs. Amir Bagherioromi noted that South Africa faced sustained US pressure during its presidency, so advocacy needs risk management. He used South African data to show why G20 decisions reach daily life: the richest 1% own about 55% of wealth, unemployment is around 34% against a G20 average of about 6%, and some 3.3 million workers hold jobs highly exposed to AI. His central advice was to combine inside access, outside legitimacy and public narrative, which reinforced each other where South Africa's presidency was strongest.

Rather than running inequality as a separate track, he proposed testing each of Korea's emerging priorities against it. On AI, the question is who benefits and which workers lose their livelihoods; on critical minerals, who bears the environmental and labour costs of extraction; on climate, which communities receive finance and which stay exposed; on food resilience, whose security is protected; and on trade, whether the rules give developing countries a fair chance.

Anselmo Lee of the C20 Korea Forum urged the coalition not to "start from zero every year". He set Korea's role in the context of its middle-power diplomacy, its membership of MIKTA, the OECD and the DAC, and the "AI-basic society" it proposed at the 2026 UN General Assembly. His advice was to plan across the UK, Korea and Mexico presidencies, understand the geopolitics, build coalitions beyond the C20 with labour, youth, women's, think-tank and parliamentary groups, and coordinate inside and outside advocacy. He also called for a small set of shared priorities campaigned on for at least two years, media accreditation for civil society, and diverse, independent funding that reaches grassroots groups.

Kyungyoung Chi of Oxfam in Korea described a progressive government with a strong position in the National Assembly that backs welfare, climate action, gender equality and "AI inclusion", yet puts growth and national interest first. Korea's official development assistance remains low relative to its economic weight. Early signals for the presidency point to AI and innovation, a not-yet-defined North–South bridge role, critical minerals and supply chains, and multilateral cooperation, including with the UK. The 2028 National Assembly election may shift the political space, so civil society must monitor government signals, link AI to inequality and demand concrete bridge commitments before the agenda hardens.

When participants completed the statement "Korea is a bridge country if…", their answers converged on a permanent and funded mechanism for civil society engagement, including in the finance track; inequality placed at the centre of all G20 streams; democratised international financial institutions and reduced developing-country debt; a new global commitment on civic space; human-rights safeguards in AI outcomes; and continuity of South Africa's agenda on inequality, debt and MDB reform. The first day closed with three shared directions: continue the IPI and fund public services, move beyond business inclusion on AI towards rights and accountability, and define what Korea's bridge role should mean in practice.

Thematic priorities

The coalition organised its agenda around six themes and chose three priority asks in each, 18 in all. Asks were developed at World Café tables over three rounds, then ranked by gallery walk and dot vote. The table sets out the voted priorities in order, alongside other asks that were discussed but not voted into the top three.

Theme	Top three priority asks (in vote order)	Other asks discussed
Democracy and civic space	1. A formal, civil society-led C20 funded by G20 governments, with its own summits, so participation is not renegotiated every year. 2. Expanded voting rights and representation for Global Majority countries in the IMF and other IFIs. 3. More funding and support for CSOs, using Korea's proposed Framework Act for Civic Participation as a model.	Position Korea as Asia's convenor on democratic engagement; use the G20 to advocate ending wars that shrink democratic space.
Debt and development finance	1. Reform MDB governance to shift voting power and decision-making towards Global South borrowers. 2. An international agreement that automatically halts debt servicing in severe distress, protecting health, fuel and social spending. 3. National parliaments review and vote on MDB loan conditions before board approval.	Full debt relief and cancellation, framed as climate reparations rather than charity, including illegitimate debt.
Inequality and social protection	1. G20 and Asian governments formally join and fund the International Panel on Inequality (IPI). 2. Comprehensive national inequality action plans in every G20 country. 3. Mandatory inequality impact checks on MDB and IMF loans before conditions are set.	Public investment in health, education, care and social protection; explore universal basic income in response to AI disruption.
Tax justice	1. Polluter-pays and progressive wealth taxes, with an overhaul of global tax governance. 2. Gender-just tax systems that recognise the gig economy in budgets and revenue processes. 3. Stronger tax administration in developing countries, with country-by-country reporting and beneficial ownership rules for Big Tech, AI and crypto.	Identify UK 2027 tax asks for Korea to carry forward; ensure revenue is spent equitably on public welfare.
Climate justice	1. A polluter-pays climate tax based on common but differentiated responsibilities, and a shift of military spending (about US$2.8 trillion a year) to climate finance and ODA. 2. Direct access to adaptation funds for rural communities, with technology transfer from developed countries. 3. Environmental, tax and labour rules for large AI data centres, and adaptation finance for glacier-outburst countries such as Nepal.	A labelling system grouping countries by adaptation technology capacity to target finance better.
Digital governance and AI	1. Binding AI governance grounded in business and human rights, with mandatory due diligence, moving beyond Korea's access-and-skills model. 2. Regulate AI's use of water, power, land and critical minerals. 3. Tax Big Tech, break up monopolies, expand public AI infrastructure and support open-source and open-weight models.	An explicit inequality framework for AI; ban or restrict military AI; protect human control and the right to opt out.

Three asks recur across themes and are natural candidates for consolidation into a shorter coalition agenda. Polluter-pays taxation appears under both tax and climate justice. Governance and conditionality at the MDBs and IMF appear under debt, inequality and democracy. AI's resource use and taxation appear under climate, tax and digital governance. Taken together, the priorities describe a coherent agenda: a permanent voice for civil society, a fairer international financial system, and the revenue and rules needed to make climate action and the AI transition reduce rather than deepen inequality.

Influence pathways and country plans

KEY POINT

Most-voted targets: G20 finance ministers and central banks (10), legislators and parliamentarians (9), national parliaments (8).

Finance ministries and central banks emerged as the coalition's top influence target, matching the lesson that the finance track is where decisions are made and where civil society is weakest. Parliamentarians and national parliaments, including Japan's Diet, ranked next because they can shape both government positions and public debate. Participants also named sherpas and the ministries leading G20 working groups, troika governments, other engagement groups (with the Y20 seen as a pressure group on inequality), ASEAN, the EU, the African Union and the MDBs. Beyond government, they pointed to Korean host-country organisations, universities, faith groups and foundations, the media, trade unions, and affected communities and youth. Private creditors were described as "mostly invisible", while ESG investors were seen as a possible lever on Big Tech.

Four groups turned this into first action plans. The India group will convene organisations on gaps in development-finance research, develop Indian positions on Korea's G20 agenda, and mobilise Indigenous and grassroots communities on climate, debt and tax justice, with a follow-up discussion planned for late October. The Indonesia group will mobilise CSOs and grassroots networks, coordinate with women's and youth groups, run research-based policy dialogues and look for entry points into the finance track.

The Korea group proposed a national steering committee to coordinate preparations and raise resources, and C20 working groups to produce policy briefs on debt, tax and illicit financial flows, while exploring AI, climate and security. It also aims to broaden the Korean coalition beyond a small circle of NGOs. The regional group, including UK, US and Japanese participants, will develop shared UK–Korea–Mexico narratives on debt justice and making polluters pay, convene UK and Korean policymakers around IMF–World Bank meetings, explore a coalition of middle powers, and engage APEC, UN regional forums and Japan's Ministry of Finance.

Key takeaways

1. The window is 2026–2027, not 2028. Every troika speaker said planning must start two to three years ahead, because most of a leaders' declaration is shaped at sherpa and working level well before the summit.
2. Build what outlasts a presidency. South Africa's lasting gains were the IPI and the African Union finance-track mechanism. The coalition's top ask, a permanent and funded civil society-led C20, follows the same logic.
3. Enter the finance track early. Debt, cost of capital and IFI reform are decided by finance ministries and central banks, which offer the least civic access. Planned, early entry is essential.
4. Put inequality inside Korea's own agenda. Ask who gains and who pays under inclusive AI, critical minerals, climate, food resilience and supply chains, rather than run inequality as a separate track.
5. Test the bridge. Korea's bridge-country claim is not yet backed by concrete commitments, and its ODA is low. The coalition wants measurable tests of what the role delivers for the Global South.
6. Fewer, sharper asks carried across presidencies. A small set of shared priorities carried from the UK in 2027 to Korea in 2028, and possibly Mexico in 2029, will achieve more than a new wish list each year.
7. Combine inside, outside and narrative, and close the loop. Technical lobbying needs grassroots legitimacy and public pressure, plain-language framing, broad alliances and media access. Communities who supply evidence must hear what became of it.

Agreements and action points

The convening agreed the six themes, with names open to adjustment, and the 18 asks, which are now to be consolidated. It agreed in principle to form a core group of about five people to coordinate follow-up. Until then, the existing Steering Committee continues and will propose the core group's membership, with seats for Korea and the UK and a balance of regions and themes. "G20 Civil Society Coalition" was the most-favoured name, but no name or formal structure was finalised. The following actions were recorded; owners and dates marked "To set" were not agreed at the meeting and should be confirmed by the Steering Committee.

Action	Owner	When
Circulate a two-page brief of the meeting	Facilitator with Oxfam	Within 2 weeks
Circulate the full meeting report after Steering Committee review	Facilitator with Steering Committee	Within 2 weeks
Decide the coalition's form, name and core group membership	Steering Committee	To set
Consolidate the 18 asks into a joint agenda and key messages	Steering Committee / core group	To set
Develop India's positions on Korea's G20 agenda; hold a follow-up CSO discussion	India group	Late October 2026
Develop the 2027–2028 activity plan and partners	Indonesia group	To set
Build the Korean coordination structure and C20 working groups	Korea group	To set
Plan UK–Korea–Mexico joint work and engagement around IMF–World Bank meetings	Regional group	To set
Plan the 2027 Seoul convening and the C20 meeting in Korea	Oxfam and C20 Korea	2027

Priorities for the next 90 days. Confirm the core group and put a named owner and date against every open action. Merge the 18 asks into five or six headline asks, each with a one-line public message. Map Korea's preparation calendar, including when sherpa and finance-track priorities will be set and how the 2028 National Assembly election affects timing. Agree with UK partners which asks to carry through the 2027 presidency, starting with debt and polluter-pays taxation. Finally, decide how commitments will be tracked and reported back to communities, and how grassroots and smaller organisations will be funded to take part.

Conclusion

The Bangkok convening began with concern about shrinking civic space and ended with a shared agenda, a first map of influence and the start of a coordination structure for the UK 2027 and Korea 2028 presidencies. The immediate test is follow-through: confirming owners, sharpening the 18 asks into a short joint agenda, and entering the finance track before Korea's priorities harden.