

Position Paper of the  
United Nations  
Inter-Agency Task Force  
on Social and  
Solidarity Economy



Inter-Agency Task Force on  
**Social and Solidarity Economy**

Advancing  
the 2030 Agenda  
through the  
Social and  
Solidarity Economy



# Advancing the 2030 Agenda through the Social and Solidarity Economy

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United Nations  
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# ABBREVIATIONS

<b>AIM</b>	International Association of Mutual Benefit Societies
<b>AMAN</b>	Indigenous Peoples Alliance of the Archipelago (Indonesia)
<b>ASSEFA</b>	Association of Sarva Seva Farms
<b>CBHI</b>	community-based health insurance
<b>CIDOB</b>	Confederación de Pueblos Indígenas del Oriente Boliviano
<b>CONADECO</b>	Confederación Nacional de Asociaciones de Desarrollo Comunal (Costa Rica)
<b>CONAIE</b>	Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador
<b>COPAC</b>	Committee for the Promotion and Advancement of Cooperatives
<b>CSA</b>	community-supported agriculture
<b>DAY-NRLM</b>	Deendayal Antayodaya Yojana of India's National Rural Livelihoods Mission
<b>DINADECO</b>	National Directorate for Communal Development (Costa Rica)
<b>ESCAP</b>	The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific of the United Nations
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FAO</b>	UN Food and Agricultural Organization
<b>FECOFUN</b>	Federation of Community Forestry Users Nepal
<b>FBES</b>	Brazilian Solidarity Economy Forum
<b>FSC</b>	Forest Stewardship Council
<b>GECES</b>	European Commission Expert Group on Social Entrepreneurship
<b>GSEF</b>	Global Social Economy Forum
<b>ICA</b>	International Compliance Association
<b>ICT</b>	information and communications technology
<b>ILC</b>	International Labour Conference
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>JAUH</b>	Jaringan untuk Hutan (Indonesia)
<b>KHJL</b>	Koperasi Hutan Jaya Lestari (Indonesia)
<b>LED</b>	local economic development
<b>MERCOSUR</b>	The Southern Common Market
<b>MESSE</b>	Ecuadorian Movement of Social and Solidarity Economy
<b>MST</b>	Landless Rural Workers Movement (Brazil)
<b>NGO</b>	non-governmental organization
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>PASS</b>	Programme d'Appui aux Stratégies Sociales
<b>PATAMABA</b>	National Network of Informal Workers in the Philippines
<b>RENAPESS</b>	National SSE Network of Mali
<b>RIPESS</b>	Intercontinental network for the promotion of social solidarity economy



<b>ROSCA</b>	rotating savings and credit association
<b>SAEC</b>	Society Amiga e Esportiva do Jardim Copacabana (Brazil)
<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>SEWA</b>	Self-Employed Women's Association (India)
<b>SMEs</b>	small- and medium-sized enterprises
<b>SODEFOR</b>	Forestry Development Agency (Société de Développement des Forêts) (Côte d'Ivoire)
<b>SPARC</b>	Strategic Purchasing Africa Resource Center
<b>SSE</b>	social and solidarity economy
<b>SSEOs</b>	SSE organizations and enterprises
<b>TFT</b>	Tropical Forest Trust (Indonesia)
<b>TGCS</b>	Tree Growers' Cooperative Society (India)
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNEP</b>	United Nations Environment Programme
<b>UNESCO</b>	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>UNRISD</b>	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
<b>UNTFSSSE</b>	UN Task Force on SSE
<b>WALHI</b>	Indonesian Forum for the Environment
<b>WISEs</b>	work integration social enterprises
<b>WOCCU</b>	World Council of Credit Unions



# FOREWORD



Today's society is confronted with numerous challenges including the COVID-19 pandemic, the climate emergency and rising inequality. I am particularly convinced that the social and solidarity economy (SSE) has to play a substantive role in achieving the sustainable development goals, leaving no one behind and thus, realizing the paradigm shift called for in the 2030 Agenda.

The scale, impact and potential of SSE as well as the knowledge base surrounding SSE practices and the linkages between SSE and the 17 SDG's have already been well documented.

The present position paper identifies key attributes and functions of SSE organizations as well as recent trends that have been observed.

In addition, concrete examples of best practices inspire national, regional and local authorities to foster the development of a conducive environment for the SSE.

In my view, governments worldwide need to remain strongly committed to raising awareness of the SSE and offering SSE organizations the necessary support to grow.

In the upcoming years, I will continue to promote efforts to further the SSE by implementing key actions at the national level and contributing to the development of SSE internationally.

**Georges ENGEL**

Minister of Labour,  
Employment and Social and Solidarity  
Economy of Luxembourg

The world has a huge social deficit, growing inequalities, massive environmental challenges and a lack of adequate economic development, the combination of which is preventing the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Most of all, it is causing continued human suffering and hardship. These problems have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing wars, which have exposed the pre-existing fragilities of our societies and economies.

It is imperative to create changes in the way we drive transformation.

In building forward better, the world is calling for a human and planet centred approach in addressing these global challenges. This also implies a call to look closely at economic models, based on care for people and planet, cooperation, solidarity and democracy, which put people at the centre of operations and, in doing so, combine social, economic and environmental objectives.

Based on the primacy of people and work over capital, the social and solidarity economy (SSE) represents an important ally to fulfil the promise of the Agenda 2030 to strive for a humane society via inclusive and sustainable development.

Partnerships among different actors, including SSE organizations, enterprises and ecosystems, are playing an ever-increasing role in accelerating the path for achieving and localising the SDGs and in advancing access to certain rights, to better jobs and living conditions for people, including the most excluded and vulnerable.

I am confident that the present Position Paper will increase awareness on how SSE organizations and enterprises contribute to all 17 SDGs in different contexts and represent a dynamic force for the transformational change we need.

I would like to sincerely thank all members and observers of the Task Force who contributed to the Position Paper with their knowledge, insights and expertise. I also would like to extend my special thanks to Mr. Peter Utting, Ms. Valentina Verze and Ms. Yanghaoyue Xiong for their valuable work in coordinating these collective efforts and to the Minister of Labour, Employment and the Social and Solidarity Economy of Luxembourg, Mr. Georges Engel, whose trust and partnership allowed us to pursue our common agenda.

The UNTFSSSE will continue promoting the SSE in the service of sustainable development and more resilient, inclusive and democratic societies and economies.



**Vic Van Vuuren**

Chair of the United Nations Task Force  
on SSE and Director of the Enterprises Department  
at the International Labour Organization

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The social and solidarity economy (SSE) is a dynamic force for change that is key to realizing the paradigm shift called for in the 2030 Agenda. This position paper examines the contribution of SSE to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), identifies policy and legal reforms that can foster an institutional environment conducive to SSE, and calls attention to the need for advocacy and policy innovation at multiple levels of governance – local, regional, national and international.

There is an opportunity to rethink the means of implementation for achieving the SDGs by focusing more on SSE. Indeed, with 2030 fast approaching and with the SDGs significantly off track, it is important to broaden the involvement of stakeholders, such as SSE organizations and enterprises (SSEOs), which can help accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. It may also not be too early to consider a post-2030 agenda that fundamentally rethinks the role of enterprises in society and pays far more attention to other forms of economy that support sustainable approaches to production and consumption, pursue equity with efficiency and reconcile the common good with private interest.

In a context where progress towards the SDGs has stalled, SSE signals a concrete pathway for placing people and the planet front and centre in the development agenda. It provides a road map that signposts specific types of organizations and enterprises that reconnect the economy and society, as well as principles grounded in ethical values, development objectives and priorities. Governments can take full advantage of this road map.

SSE is a distinct form of economy. It comprises associations, cooperatives, mutual societies, foundations, social enterprises, self-help groups and social movements and networks, operating in both the formal and informal economy. SSEOs prioritize a combination of social, environmental, democratic and emancipatory objectives. They are guided by principles and practices that emphasize the primacy of people and work over capital, a profit distribution constraint, participatory governance, mutual aid, voluntary cooperation, collective action and local development as key mechanisms for empowerment and well-being.

The scale of SSE is often underestimated in national statistics and policy, partly due to variability in the definition of SSE in different contexts and the difficulties of measuring the scale and impacts of smaller SSEOs,

**There is an opportunity to rethink the means of implementation for achieving the SDGs by focusing more on SSE**

**SSE signals a concrete pathway for placing people and the planet front and centre in the development agenda**

**SSE is a distinct form of economy**

**The scale of SSE is often underestimated**



**SSE relates significantly to all 17 SDGs**

**Realizing the development potential of SSE confronts numerous challenges**

**Increasing interaction with profit-oriented business and the public sector generates both opportunities and risks**

some of which form part of the informal economy. Mistakenly, SSE has been considered a fringe actor on the development stage and has not attained the place it deserves in public policy frameworks.

While commonly associated with social development objectives, SSE relates significantly to all 17 SDGs. SSEOs are not only geared towards multiple economic and socio-political development goals but also often operate on a scale that can impact entire territories and sectors. Indeed, SSE can bring about systemic change as it diversifies, expands and interacts with other sectors and institutions. Around the world, governments are integrating SSEOs into national welfare systems and frameworks for inclusive growth; civil society organizations are transitioning towards social enterprise and advocating on behalf of SSE; profit-oriented firms are integrating SSEOs in their value chains; and networks of SSEOs are impacting governance at local, regional, national and international levels.

Realizing the development potential of SSE confronts numerous challenges. Set up by local communities to solve local problems, many SSEOs lack essential resources and know-how and are located in low-value segments of markets and value chains with low growth potential and margins. Larger organizations may experience mission drift that can weaken democratic, autonomous, solidaristic and redistributive features of SSE. And policy and regulatory support is often fragmented and piecemeal.

Increasing interaction with profit-oriented business and the public sector generates both opportunities and risks. It has enabled inclusive business models, facilitated social innovation and welfare provision to underserved populations, provided much needed incentives and mobilized finance and other resources for SSE from multiple sources. But there is often a tendency within policymaking to focus on a narrow range of SSEOs, such as social enterprises and social entrepreneurship, ignoring their diversity; a narrow set of SSE attributes related to social purpose, ignoring features such as democratic governance and collective action; and a narrow range of policy instruments that can sideline other important levers of innovation and transformative change.

Recent research has revealed that the impact of SSE is particularly significant in terms of employment, the provision of social services, women's empowerment, access to affordable finance and local economic development. Equally important are less-tangible benefits involving social cohesion and resilience at the community level, as well as participatory decision-making not only within SSEOs but also in policymaking.

SSE provides an important means of dealing with multiple contemporary crises. It can play a significant role in preventing crises, enabling recovery and building resilience. SSEOs have proven to be resilient in the face of regional and global financial crises. They have adopted numerous innovations to adapt to the new circumstances associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and address both short- and long-term needs that have arisen in its wake. Many social enterprises, social cooperatives and solidarity networks have emerged to address the needs of migrants, internally displaced people and refugees from conflict zones.

SSEOs catalyse social transformation by strengthening the productive capacities of vulnerable and marginalized groups and producing goods and services accessible to them, thus helping to achieve the objective of leaving no one behind (SDGs 1 & 2). SSE yields benefits associated not only with material aspects of poverty reduction and food security, including income, assets such as land, and access to food and social protection, but also other enabling conditions that widen people's choices. The political, cultural and social features of SSE, including democratic governance, active citizenship, mutual support, solidarity and a sense of belonging or community, are crucial in this regard.

SSE activity is expanding rapidly in sectors centred on the provision of services related to health, care, education and training (SDGs 3 & 4). In contexts where NGO funding has declined and governments are contracting out welfare services, many NGOs have transitioned to income-generating activities and new forms of multi-stakeholder or social cooperatives have emerged. As a result, the range of social enterprises operating in this area is expanding rapidly. Youth, women, the elderly and unemployed, in particular, have benefited from these developments.

**SSE is particularly significant in terms of employment, the provision of social services, women's empowerment, access to affordable finance and local economic development**

**SSE provides an important means for promoting gender equality and tackling the growing divide between rich and poor**

**SSEOs catalyse social transformation by strengthening the productive capacities of vulnerable and marginalized group**



**SSE provides an important means for promoting gender equality and tackling the growing divide between rich and poor**

**SSE can play an important role in relation to other aspects of decent work, namely, social dialogue, labour rights and social protection, as well as inclusive and sustainable growth**

**The local anchoring of SSEOs, as well as their role in participatory governance and the provision of essential services, makes them key partners in building sustainable cities and settlements**

SSE provides an important means for promoting gender equality and tackling the growing divide between rich and poor (SDGs 5 & 10). Women often constitute the majority of workers and users associated with SSEOs, while many are established by women. Compared to conventional enterprises, SSEOs show a tendency to be more inclusive: they take on initially disadvantaged and vulnerable women at risk of exclusion from the traditional job market, and they include a far higher percentage of women in decision-making roles. SSE not only targets those on the lower rungs of the income pyramid; it also addresses the structural causes of extreme income and wealth inequality by promoting a people-centred, more labour intensive, economy, rather than processes of economic growth that skew the distribution of benefits towards capital and multinational corporations.

Beyond direct employment and concern for working conditions, SSE can play an important role in relation to other aspects of decent work, namely, social dialogue, labour rights and social protection, as well as inclusive and sustainable growth (SDGs 8 & 9). Through advocacy and alliances with trade unions, political parties and others, intermediary SSEOs and vertically structured SSE networks often engage with the policy process to co-design and co-implement policies and strengthen and expand social protection and labour rights. Employment generation associated with the growth of labour-intensive sectors of SSE is important for addressing the employment deficit associated with technological change. SSE is also key for tackling decent work deficits associated with informal employment and facilitating informal economy transition. As both governments and markets turn their attention to social innovation, financing opportunities have increased for some types of SSEOs. Nevertheless, problems of access to credit remain. They involve not only on demand-side deficiencies related to SSEOs themselves, but also supply-side deficiencies related to financial institutions that lean heavily on standardized for-profit criteria. The problem cannot be solved without a more articulated vision.

The local anchoring of SSEOs, as well as their role in participatory governance and the provision of essential services, makes them key partners in building sustainable cities and settlements (SDGs 6 & 11). Cooperatives, social enterprises and community-based organizations all have considerable potential for building sustainable cities and settlements and ensuring more circularity in the economy. This is particularly apparent in relation to social housing, waste collection and

recycling, care services, cultural activities and community supported agriculture – all areas where SSE has a strong presence.

By blending socially inclusive and equitable practices with climate action and green economy, SSE is essential for just transition (SDGs 7, 12 & 13). SSEOs are actively responding to the climate emergency. Many focus their activities on sustainable agriculture, community forestry, renewable energy and protection of the commons. In contrast to profit-oriented business, they tend to have a far smaller environmental footprint because they encourage local production and trade and are under less pressure to externalize environmental costs. While environmental objectives are still secondary for many cooperatives and social enterprises, they are increasingly receptive to emerging environmental standards and imperatives.

SSE can play a key role in protecting life above ground and below water (SDGs 14 & 15) given the fact that the values, local knowledge, worldviews, social relations and governance arrangements that characterize SSE tend to be inherently more aligned with the goal of protecting and regenerating nature. The limits of green economy approaches centred on corporate sustainability and the commodification of nature can be seen in sharp relief when compared to the positive connections between the social system that characterizes SSE and the natural system with which SSE interacts. Such connections are increasingly documented in relation to indigenous populations, agroecological and fair trade practices, agro- and community forestry, sustainable fishing and sustainable tourism.

Political and institutional developments around the world are simultaneously enabling and disabling SSE (SDGs 16 & 17). A major challenge concerns threats to civil and political rights in a number of countries that can impact advocacy and participatory governance. SSEOs, however, are finding spaces to enhance governance and policymaking at local, provincial, national and international levels, and forging partnerships, networks and coalitions to promote more people-centred economies. New forms of SSEOs have also expanded the scope for participatory governance by considering not only members but also users as primary stakeholders. Far more attention needs to be focused on the issue of policy coherence to ensure that levels of support for SSE are consistent with policy commitments and are sustained through time, and that policies related to different sectors and development objectives are complementary and synergistic rather than contradictory.

**By blending socially inclusive and equitable practices with climate action and green economy, SSE is essential for just transition**

**SSE can play a key role in protecting life above ground and below water**

**Political and institutional developments around the world are simultaneously enabling and disabling SSE**

**A core group of national governments and parliaments have taken a lead in recognizing and institutionalizing SSE within policy and legal frameworks**

**Policymakers worldwide can take stock of the experiences of governments and parliaments that have pioneered reforms promoting SSE**

**Intergovernmental organizations can be more responsive to policy proposals put forward by SSE actors and proactive in knowledge building and mobilizing resources for SSE**

A core group of national governments and parliaments have taken a lead in recognizing and institutionalizing SSE within policy and legal frameworks. Key measures include framework laws mandating State support for SSE; a widening portfolio of policy instruments directly targeting SSEOs; the creation of ministries, agencies and programmes with direct responsibility for SSE; action plans and development strategies centred on SSE, and consultative and decision-making processes that facilitate the participation of SSEOs.

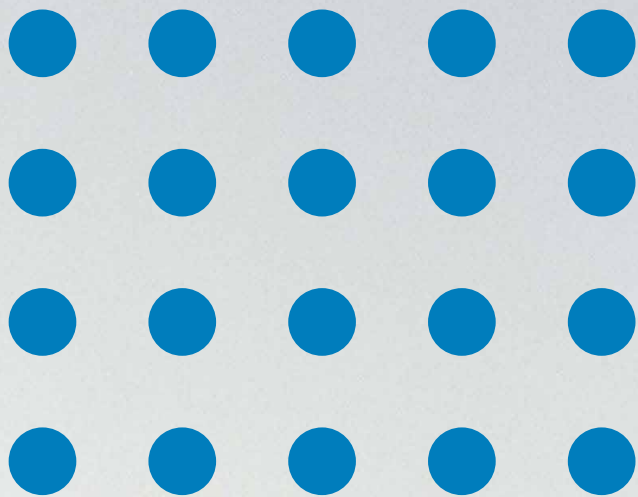
Policymakers worldwide can take stock of the experiences of governments and parliaments that have pioneered reforms promoting SSE. These experiences demonstrate that governments at national, regional and local levels can position SSE far more centrally in their development agendas, play a constructive role in fostering an institutional environment conducive to SSE and create and institutionalize spaces for participatory policymaking and implementation. Examples from pioneering countries can help others build their own action plans to foster SSE in their respective contexts. But advocacy and policy innovations at multiple levels of governance are still needed to realize the full potential of SSE.

Intergovernmental organizations can be more responsive to policy proposals put forward by SSE actors and proactive in knowledge building and mobilizing resources for SSE. United Nations agencies can address SSE more systematically within their policies and action plans and lend the necessary support to governments when needed. Recent initiatives provide important pointers for how to raise the visibility of SSE globally and institutionalize SSE within the multilateral system. These include creating or strengthening advocacy and knowledge networks, institutionalizing SSE via internationally agreed norms, comprehensive



policy guidance for governments and enhanced development cooperation for SSE. More specifically, governments can strengthen dialogue and collaboration with the UNTFSSSE, intergovernmental organizations and international and regional networks supporting SSE. Regional bodies can formulate SSE action plans to be implemented by Member States. United Nations and other intergovernmental bodies can adopt recommendations and normative guidelines that have the status of international soft law. International financial institutions, including development banks, can expand programmes to invest and build capacity in SSEOs and social protection. And stronger coalitions or consortia of actors and networks can be formed.

The UNTFSSSE stands ready to assist governments in creating an enabling environment and policy framework for SSE, especially in developing countries. It will work towards ensuring the sustainability of initiatives that enhance the profile of SSE internationally by promoting education, knowledge creation and sharing and policy guidance. The Task Force supports member states that are advancing the request that the United Nations General Assembly adopt a resolution on SSE, calling on the Secretary-General to direct UN agencies to formulate a Plan of Action on SSE in support of the SDGs and to report periodically on progress.





# INTRODUCTION

“

*Had the paradigm shift envisioned by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development been fully embraced..., the world would have been better prepared to face this crisis... Regrettably, the SDGs were already off track even before COVID-19 emerged.*

”

**António Guterres,**  
Secretary-General of the United Nations, 2021 (UN 2021).

Since its formation in 2013, the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Social and Solidarity Economy (UNTFSSSE) has called on the international development community to recognize the role of the social and solidarity economy (SSE) in the paradigm shift referred to above by the United Nations Secretary-General. One of the Task Force's first initiatives was to prepare a position paper to raise awareness of negotiators of the 2030 Agenda of the need to consider SSE as a means to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UNTFSSSE 2014). As we approach the mid point of the 2030 Agenda implementation phase, it is an opportune moment to revisit the role of SSE in achieving the 17 SDGs. Indeed, in a context where the SDGs are “off track” and where governments and the private sector are struggling to reengineer an economic system and policies that can prevent major geo-political, financial, health and planetary crises, it is imperative to revisit the role of different forms of economy and new economics for sustainable development.

Far more is now known about the scale, impact and potential of SSE than was the case when the SDGs were being negotiated. The knowledge base surrounding SSE practices, dynamics and contributions, as well as SSE-SDG linkages at the local level have been increasingly well documented via the work of civil society organizations, researchers, government agencies and SSE practitioners themselves (COPAC 2020; ICA 2021; RIPESS 2021; UNRISD 2019; UNTFSSSE, n.d.a.; Yi et al. 2022; UNTFSSSE, n.d.b.; Baisatti and Lopez Muñoz 2021; WEF 2022). This paper refers to multiple case studies and good practices but also pays particular attention to the issue of how SSE can impact at scale in different sectors, territories and jurisdictions through replication, vertical structures, networks and partnerships.

By examining systematically how SSE relates to all 17 SDGs and numerous specific targets, the aim of this position paper is three-fold:

- To illustrate how SSE is a dynamic force for change that is key for realizing the paradigm shift called for in the 2030 Agenda;
- To identify policy and legal reforms that yield important lessons for governments and parliaments worldwide as to how they can foster an institutional environment conducive to SSE;



- To call attention to the need for advocacy and policy innovation at multiple levels of governance – local, regional, national and international.

By extending the focus to all the SDGs, which are clustered below under eight issue areas, this position paper builds on and updates the 2014 analysis undertaken by the UNTFSSSE. It addresses many of the 66 specific SDG targets that the UNTFSSSE considers could particularly benefit from SSE (UNTFSSSE 2016). Drawing on rich sources of information and analyses that have emerged in recent years, the paper begins by identifying key attributes and functions of SSEOs and revisiting how SSE should be framed. It also identifies recent trends in the development of SSE and contemporary challenges that need to be addressed. Subsequent sections of the paper examine the contribution of SSE to eight clusters of SDGs, providing concrete regional, country and local examples. Considerable attention is paid to the contribution of SSE in dealing with contemporary crises and the challenge of building forward better. These include the COVID-19 pandemic, the climate emergency, rising inequality, the future of work and worrisome trends that negatively impact democracy and participatory governance. The paper ends by considering a path forward for crafting policy and institutional environments that can enable SSE to realize its potential, focusing in particular on the role that governments and inter-governmental organizations can play in this process.



## **Box 0.1** **The United Nations Task Force on Social and Solidarity Economy**

The Task Force serves as a coordination mechanism for the promotion of SSE within and beyond the UN system. It seeks to:

- enhance the recognition of the role of SSE organizations and enterprises (SSEOs) in sustainable development;
- promote knowledge of SSE and the consolidation of SSE networks;
- support the establishment of an enabling institutional and policy environment for SSE;
- ensure coordination of international efforts and create and strengthen partnerships.

Currently chaired by the ILO, the Task Force members include 18 United Nations and other multilateral entities. The Task Force is enriched through the active participation of observers representing research and advisory centres, such as CIRIEC International, EURICSE, DIESIS and EMES International, as well as leading regional and international and SSE networks. The latter include the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA); the SSE International Forum (ESS-FI); the Intercontinental Network for the Promotion of Social Solidarity Economy (RIPESS), which includes six continental networks; Catalyst 2030; and the Global Social Economy Forum (GSEF), whose membership includes many municipalities from around the world.





# 1. UNDERSTANDING SSE

As interest in SSE expands globally, how it is interpreted can vary from country to country and among different stakeholders. It is therefore important for the Task Force to revisit what SSE is, how it differs from and blends with other private and public sector institutions, and why its core attributes are essential for realizing the 2030 Agenda.

## Key attributes and roles

When the UNTFSSSE was established, it discussed a concise interpretation of SSE that noted the following principles and practices:

“ *SSE encompasses organizations and enterprises that have explicit economic and social (and often environmental) objectives; involve varying degrees and forms of cooperative, associative and solidarity relations between workers, producers and consumers; and practice workplace democracy and self-management. SSE includes traditional forms of cooperatives and mutual associations, as well as women’s self-help groups, community forestry groups, social provisioning organizations or ‘proximity services’, fair trade organizations, associations of informal sector workers, social enterprises, and community currency and alternative finance schemes.* ”

UNTFSSSE 2014

This understanding sought to succinctly convey key features of SSE by highlighting the social and environmental purpose of organizations and enterprises engaged in the production of goods and services, the key actors involved and practices and principles of cooperation, solidarity and democratic governance within organizations (OECD 2018).

Experience shows that SSE organizations and enterprises (SSEOs) often provide their members and users with indispensable economic and social services and employment opportunities in ways that are more effective or efficient than conventional public and private sector entities (Borzaga and Tortia 2017). Furthermore, they can crowd in private and public investments by providing goods and services in locally rooted markets and sectors which are not traditionally served by these other sectors.

Created from the bottom up, they are born either to fulfil unmet needs or social objectives, or out of the vision of entrepreneurs who manage their enterprise by placing people (whether employees or clients) above profits. Because of their goals and governance structure they empower individual workers, producers and consumers not only economically but also socio-politically in terms of voice and agency. As women often constitute the majority of workers and users of SSEOs, the latter constitute a key avenue for women’s empowerment.



***Through collective action and by pooling resources, SSEOs can achieve economies of scale, increase their bargaining power and mobilize resources from multiple sources, as well as safeguard employment and social protection in times of crisis and build community resilience to shocks such as pandemics or conflict.***

Through employment training and other means, they provide opportunities for disadvantaged people, including persons with disabilities. The social norms to which SSEOs adhere and community practices centred on the common good can facilitate the sustainable use and management of natural resources and common property. And through social dialogue, their networks and associations can influence the policy process. Such features resonate with what academic research has identified as key determinants of inclusive and sustainable development – ranging from “plural economy” (Polyani 1944), through the management of common pool resources (Ostrom 1990) to “development as freedom” (Sen 1999) and women’s empowerment (Agarwal 2014).

***The importance of SSE in relation to the 2030 Agenda derives from the multiple roles that SSEOs can play in fostering patterns of development that are inclusive, fair and sustainable***

(Fonteneau and Pollet 2019). Indeed, SSE can play an important role in various forms of economy that economists have recently colour-coded as green (environmental protection), purple (the care economy), orange (cultural and creative industries) and blue (coastal and ocean habitats) (Line Carpentier 2021).





The multiple roles and attributes of SSE can be summed up as follows:



**Economically**, SSEOs contribute to decent work and often facilitate the integration of disadvantaged persons in the labour market. Through income generation, easier access to markets and finance, fair trade, and ethical and solidarity-based financial practices and investments, they promote local economic and enterprise development, fostering entrepreneurship and incubating alternative approaches to producing goods and services. SSEOs can create sustainable economic activity in areas of production and service provision where State and market actors have a limited presence often due to geographical remoteness and because they are considered too niche or not very profitable. By providing social services such as primary care, accommodation and education, SSEOs are well-positioned to alleviate the burden on public financing.



**Socially**, SSEOs embed the economy in social values and local territories. They involve or target vulnerable groups (OECD 2020) to alleviate poverty, extend social protection (ILO 2022a) and labour rights, and build trust, social cohesion and more resilient communities. SSEOs can play a prominent role in addressing the emerging needs associated with increasing migration flows, helping immigrant communities better integrate into their host countries.



**Environmentally**, SSEOs, in several sectors, promote sustainable production and consumption patterns through activities and innovations that preserve, rehabilitate or sustainably manage natural capital and involve climate change adaptation. SSEOs are vital stakeholders in the circular economy (OECD and European Commission 2022). While often lacking knowledge and resources to adopt more environmentally friendly practices, SSEOs in other sectors are often more open to meeting environmental standards than profit-centred companies.



**Culturally and philosophically**, SSE reasserts the role of ethics, justice, democracy and participation in the economy, social relations and governance; fosters cultural diversity; and recognizes the inter-connectedness of human life and nature. Intrinsic to SSE is the notion that economic action is not simply guided by a neutral or self-regulating price mechanism but by a vision of society and its founding values, which range from sharing or solidarity, as in the case of volunteering, to meeting unmet needs.

Systemically, SSE can shape the policy process and broader institutional ecosystem that structures patterns of resource use and distribution, including social and power relations. Accordingly, it can transform structures that historically have reproduced deprivation, inequality and other forms of injustice (Dacheux and Goujon 2011, Laville 2022, Razeto 1999, Catalyst 2030 2021). **Because SSE tends to involve a multifaceted approach centred on capabilities, agency, values, equity, stewardship and innovation, it is key from the perspective of integrated and holistic development, and the possibility of achieving numerous SDG targets at once.**



These dimensions are important from the perspective of crafting processes of change that are inclusive, fair and sustainable – features that are captured by the concept of a just transition (UNDP 2020). As described in UNDP’s 2020 Human Development Report:

“The concept of a just transition is not merely a technical process of moving from a fossil fuel-based to a low-carbon system—it is a political process ... Green innovation alone would not suffice to make the transition happen in the first place or to ensure that it is just. A just transition would require creating political coalitions among social and environmental movements, minority groups, labour unions, people employed in the energy sectors and engaged local communities.”

In this context, SSE has the capacity to mobilize resources to meet unmet needs, distribute the costs and revenues of productive activities more equitably and empower the disadvantaged. In doing so, they can address the roots causes of poverty, inequality and injustice (Borzaga et al. 2020, Utting 2022). Key in this regard, is the fact that SSE is more than an organizational setting concerned with economic, social and environmental aspects; it is also political in the sense that it aims to democratize governance and empower disadvantaged groups. Through participatory decision-making, social dialogue and active engagement in the policy process – or “active citizenship” – SSEOs, including the intermediary organizations and associations that represent their interests, seek to promote civic values, realize human rights and ensure that people can exert control over the resources, policies and regulations that affect their lives.

## Assessing the scale of SSE

Mistakenly, SSE has long been considered a fringe actor on the development stage and has not attained the place it deserves within the public policy agenda. This is partly due to the difficulties of quantifying SSE due to the sheer numbers of small organizations and informal economy entities. A clearer picture, however, is beginning to emerge of the scale of various types of SSEOs and their activities and impacts in several countries and regions, as well as globally. Examples from around the world illustrate the extent to which SSEOs can impact essential aspects of well-being and livelihood related to access to employment and social and financial services.

### World



- An estimated one billion people are affiliated with cooperatives as workers, producers and users of services (Eum 2017; ICA, n.d.). An estimated 10 per cent of the global working population are employed in cooperatives or in the activities they directly support. The top 300 reported a turnover of nearly US\$2.2 trillion in 2019 (ICA and EURICSE 2021).
- Credit unions report a membership base of 375 million people in 118 countries. The World Council of Credit Unions represents 86,400 savings and credit cooperatives whose have accumulated US\$3.2 trillion in assets (WOCCU 2020).
- Some 922 million members or policyholders were served by mutual/cooperative insurance companies in 2017, and the sector employed 1.16 million people (ICMIF 2019).



- In 39 countries surveyed, more than 260,000 philanthropic foundations were in operation, with 60 percent of the total in Europe and 35 percent in North America (Johnson 2018).

### Asia



- China – Over a million village committees in rural areas and an equivalent number of neighbourhood committees in urban areas provide services and assistance, particularly to those excluded from the social service system. An estimated 160 million producers are affiliated to approximately one million cooperatives (Eum 2017).
- Japan – Membership of 591 consumer cooperatives accounts for approximately 30 per cent of the population (ILO 2022b).
- India – Millions of self-help groups connect an estimated 50 million households to the DAY-NRLM poverty reduction programme (Government of India, n.d.).

### Europe



- An estimated 160 million people are members of SSE enterprises (European Commission, n.d.b).
- In 2015, 2.8 million SSEOs provided over 13.6 million paid jobs (6.3 per cent of the total) in the European Union, representing 8 per cent of the EU's gross domestic product (Monzón and Chaves 2016).
- Italy – The estimated number of social enterprises amounted to over 102,000 in 2017, accounting for almost 900,000 paid workers and an annual turnover of €42.7 million (Borzaga 2020).
- United Kingdom – Approximately 100,000 social enterprises generate revenues in the region of £59 billion and employ 2 million people (Social Enterprise UK 2018).

### Latin America and the Caribbean



- Argentina – Mutuels provide health services to over 2.5 million people; 40 per cent of the private health services are covered by 7,000 mutuels (Puzino 2018). Cooperatives provide electrical power to 7 million Argentinians and over 80 per cent of Argentina's rural electricity network is run cooperatively (Puzino 2018).
- Brazil has an estimated 5,314 cooperatives with more than 15 million members and 427,000 employees (Sistema OCB 2020).
- Mexico has 61,000 SSEOs with 12 million members, including 15,000 cooperatives with 8 million affiliates, 100 unions and 8 confederations (Herrera et al. 2018).
- Caribbean countries record the highest penetration rate among the world's credit unions with a regional average of 66 per cent (WOCCU 2020).



### Middle East and North Africa



- Kuwait – 70 consumer cooperatives, which allocate 25 per cent of their net profit to charity, control 65 per cent of the food and beverage market in the country (Oxford Business Group, n.d.).
- Morocco – The number of associations in the country was estimated to be more than 150,000 in 2019. A 2011 census estimated that membership in the country’s associations totalled approximately 15 million people. The number of cooperatives tripled from nearly 10,000 in 2012 to more than over 34,000 in 2019 (Bazi 2021).

### North America



- Canada – 5,812 non-financial cooperatives employ 105,000 staff and generate an annual turnover of approximately US\$40.7 billion (Statistics Canada 2019). Membership in 2015 totalled 31.8 million (TIESS, n.d.). In the province of Quebec, 11,000 SSEOs employ 220,000 (Chantier de l’économie sociale, n.d.).
- United States – Nearly 30,000 cooperatives have approximately 725,000 employees and 700,000 producer members (Eum 2017).

### Sub-Saharan Africa



- Kenya – Cooperatives employ over 300,000 workers and generate 2 million jobs indirectly (Majurin 2012). They accounted for over a fifth of the marketing of key agricultural products in 2019 (ILO 2022b).
- Rwanda – The community-based health insurance scheme reached a coverage rate of 85.6 per cent of the targeted population in 2021 (RSSB 2022).
- South Africa – Approximately 650,000 entities are registered as non-profit organizations and cooperatives (Steinman 2020). Nearly 40 per cent of the population are members of the country’s 810,000 informal savings schemes and burial societies, known as “stokvels”, whose deposits amount to an estimated RD 50 billion (approximately US\$3 billion) annually (NASASA 2020).

## Contemporary trends and challenges

The contours of SSE have changed significantly in recent decades, not least in contexts of economic liberalization and contemporary crises related to finance and climate. Agricultural cooperatives in Africa and Asia, for example, have reasserted their autonomy from the State and political parties. Millions of self-help groups in India and elsewhere have diversified their activities beyond microfinance. In Europe, North America and other regions, attention has focused on forms of social enterprise that provide social and general interest services in an entrepreneurial way, and diversify their stakeholder base beyond members (Galera and Salvatori 2015). In countries with large Muslim populations, there is growing recognition of the role of Islamic finance and its impact on business-society relations as a key feature of

SSE. In Latin America, coalitions involving SSE networks, social movements and political parties have emphasized the role of SSE not only in local development but also systemic change.

Just as in the past, when the cooperative movement was strengthened by developing vertically integrated multi-tiered structures, today networks are playing a similar role. Both networks and consortia of SSE organizations can play a key role in the development and facilitation of SSE, not least by advocating for the types of reforms and innovations in public policy that are discussed in more depth in sections 9 and 10.

**Worldwide, SSEOs are being integrated in national welfare systems and poverty reduction and work integration programmes.** Through advocacy and participation in the policy process they have also expanded the scope of social protection and labour rights to hitherto excluded or underserved populations. Through fiscal incentives, public procurement, ring-fencing public resources for SSE, partnerships, social dialogue and other means, **an increasing number of governments and parliaments are expanding public policy support for SSE and adopting more comprehensive SSE legal frameworks. More governments are also developing targeted action plans and strategies to support SSE.** Beyond increased State support, there are signs that a more expansive and supportive institutional ecosystem – one involving also the broader private sector and civil society – is beginning to emerge.

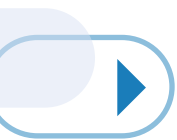
Institutionalization and support for SSE is also growing within the multilateral system, both regionally and globally. Various inter-governmental organizations, including UN agencies and the OECD, as well as supranational bodies such as the African Union and European Union, are increasingly active in establishing international norms and providing policy guidance for member-States.

## Organizational and policy challenges at the national level

Such trends generally bode well for strengthening the role of SSE in achieving the 2030 Agenda. Nevertheless, realizing its potential confronts multiple challenges, briefly noted here but discussed throughout this position paper.

In terms of size and resource endowments, SSEOs are positioned on an extremely wide spectrum. At one end are large cooperatives, operating mainly in the insurance, agricultural and the wholesale/retail sectors, with multi-billion-dollar revenues. The top 300 cooperatives had a total turnover of US\$2,180 billion for the year 2019 (ICA and EURICSE 2021). Large SSEOs are prone to “isomorphism”; in other words, their mission and governance may change as they adopt principles and practices characteristic of large public or private sector organizations. There is the risk, for example, that hierarchical forms of management may displace participatory governance. This can occur as organizations not only grow economically but also engage in partnerships and contractual arrangements with public and private entities. Such relations can impact democratic, autonomous, solidaristic and redistributive features of SSE.





***Strong adherence to SSE values, innovations in governance and adherence to principles of effective governance related to the representation and voice of members, as well as expertise, are needed to guard against isomorphism (Birchall 2017).***

The experience of the Mondragon Cooperative Corporation, headquartered in the Basque region of Spain, is illustrative in this regard. As a result of both domestic and global expansion through the acquisition of private sector firms, Mondragon is the largest cooperative group in the industry and utility sector (ICA and EURICSE 2019). Despite the growth of non-cooperative subsidiaries, participatory mechanisms have been extended to workers to allow them to participate in management, as well as to own capital (Flecha and Ngai 2014).

Cooperatives and other forms of SSEOs must guard against mismanagement and opportunism. Cooperative education, related to both management training and ethical values, has a key role to play in this regard. So, too, has labour inspection and the application of labour laws. Effective labour regulation can guard against the emergence of “pseudo cooperatives” that are formed, for example, to gain access to tax advantages or social security benefits, while failing to adhere to labour norms and cooperative principles (ILO 2022b).

Small SSEOs face additional challenges. Set up by local communities to solve local problems, many are created by necessity rather than for opportunity. They therefore often lack essential resources and know-how and are located in low-value segments of markets and value chains with low growth potential and margins (Mukherjee-Reed 2015). The informal nature of many SSE activities and their limited voice within the policy process can mean that SSE either remains largely invisible in the policy



agenda or marginal within social and fiscal policy, as well as public procurement. As a result, SSEOs often operate on an unlevel playing field vis-à-vis profit-focused firms. And as discussed below in relation to SDG 5, women's participation in self-help groups and other collectivities can be seriously impeded by structural and cultural contexts such as lack of property rights, time constraints associated with unpaid work, and limited voice and bargaining power (Agarwal 2015).

Such variations in both size and constraints suggest the need for broad-based and integrated forms of policy and legal support for SSE, which are addressed below in sections 9 and 10. Yet, while SSE is now recognized as a distinct and vital sector of the economy in a growing number of countries, policy support is often not only limited but also fragmented and piecemeal.

***Lack of data and statistical representation of the sector in national accounts is a major challenge.*** Because of their variety and differentiated historical and institutional evolution, SSEOs are often difficult to capture in statistics that measure scale and impact.

In many countries only some types of SSEOs are supported and regulated by law. ***Weak legal frameworks, in turn, can constrain access to financial services, subsidies, fiscal incentives, public procurement and other forms of government support.***

They can also encourage new social purpose organizations to establish themselves legally as companies or non-governmental organizations rather than cooperatives or social enterprises.

Government initiatives that integrate SSEOs into welfare systems have provided funding and incentives that can help kick-start and replicate organizations. In the absence of multiple, integrated and sustained forms of support, however, their economic sustainability can be at risk, as well as their level of adherence to SSE values (ILO 2022c). Such vulnerabilities partly account for the number of non-functioning cooperatives in some countries and transient social enterprises (Park 2021, ILO 2021a, ILO 2018a).

## Reasserting core values and practices

As SSE practices have gained visibility around the world, different countries and stakeholders have adopted different terminology to refer to the organizations, activities and principles involved – “social economy”, “solidarity economy”, “plural economy”, “popular economy”, “social enterprise” and “inclusive business”, among others (Fonteneau et al. 2011, Utting 2015, Fonteneau and Pollet 2019). Varied interpretations or points of emphasis regarding key attributes are also apparent. ***Recognizing and respecting this plurality of perspectives is important for promoting SSE as a force for change in very different societal and regional contexts, as well as for addressing different needs.*** They also point to the fact that SSE principles and practices related, for example, to social inclusion and social dialogue are not simply a feature of a particular (SSE) sector of the economy; they can also infuse the broader private and public and sectors. This has occurred through an expanding portfolio of public–private–SSE partnerships, as well as the growth of inclusive business models, and public sector innovations such as



outsourcing and participatory budgeting. In the case of inclusive business, SSE not only engages with the for-profit sector within value chains and through philanthropy; it can play a role as a precursor to the growth of inclusive business.

But some interpretations of SSE run the risk of sidelining certain features of SSE (Fraisie et al. 2016, Barco Serrano et al. 2019, Jenkins et al. 2021, Utting 2016). Ongoing research and advocacy caution against viewing SSE through a narrow lens that minimizes certain principles and functions and fails to recognize the diversity of SSEOs. ***In a context where SSE interacts increasingly with both public and private sector institutions, it is important to fully recognize the legitimacy of SSE as a distinct form of economy and clarify how it differs from these sectors and entities.*** Indeed, the absence of legal frameworks for SSE can give rise to ambiguity and uncertainty, which, in turn, can constrain the development of SSE (OECD, forthcoming-a).

Laws and policy documents drawn up in recent years call attention to several important features that more clearly distinguish SSE from other forms of organization and enterprise (Cotera Fretel 2019). These generally include:

- the primacy of people's needs and work over capital and profit-maximization;
- democratic governance, including participatory decision-making and the principle of "one member one vote", rather than shareholder primacy and managerial hierarchy;
- a profit-distribution constraint, asset lock and the reinvestment of most profits in social and sustainable development activities;
- locally anchored and community-centred economic activity; and
- voluntary association and autonomy vis-à-vis the State.

Furthermore, on the socio-environmental front, SSE practices involving agroecology, fair trade and the circular economy often lean towards deeper forms of sustainability compared to initiatives associated with corporate sustainability or environmental responsibility (Utting 2013).

Establishing a common understanding of such core characteristics while recognizing variations in national contexts can facilitate effective policies to address local needs and build local capacities. ***Enhanced clarity around the defining characteristics of SSEOs and the broader institutional ecosystem is essential to inform targeted policymaking and harness the full potential of the SSE*** (OECD, forthcoming-a).

As SSE is being mainstreamed, it is very important to guard against "mission drift" where core attributes are diluted or rendered invisible. These often include:

The democratic and emancipatory dimension of SSE: Growing attention to SSE in general, and to social enterprise in particular, is largely due to attributes associated with social purpose and innovation (Defourny, Nyssens and Brolis 2019). This focus has awakened interest in SSE and is clearly placing it on the policy agenda in many countries. Nevertheless, a focus on the utilitarian value of SSE can overshadow key features of SSE related to democratic governance and its emancipatory purpose and



transformative potential (ILO 2022b, Poirier 2014, Dacheux and Goujon 2011, Laville 2022). Whereas studies or policy documents often acknowledge the role of democratic governance at the micro level of the organization, it is also important to recognize that a key feature of SSE relates to participation at multiple levels of governance. Through active citizenship, SSE seeks to democratize aspects of public administration, relations with the private sector, and multi-stakeholder and networked governance at local, national and other scales.

**Collective action:** Another feature of SSE that is sometimes sidelined relates to the role of collectivities and collective action – people organizing, associating, cooperating and mobilizing in defence of their livelihoods, culture and the environment, as well as for just transitions. In times of crisis, collective action is particularly relevant, especially at the community level, to ensure not only resilience and recovery, but also to guarantee essential goods, services and aid. Collective or communal ownership and control of assets and resources is a key element within several types of SSEOs given that SSE arises from the search for solutions to the problems of a specific community, which is active independently, primarily uses its own resources and also becomes the owner of the solutions adopted.

**SSE in the informal economy:** As SSE is mainstreamed via public policy and partnerships, there is sometimes a tendency to focus on SSE as a “third sector”, composed primarily of formal sector organizations regulated by law. It is important not to lose sight of the numerous informal dimensions of SSE, as well as the role of SSEOs in the transition to a formal economy, discussed in section 5. Three aspects are particularly relevant.

First, informal or popular economy workers, producers, traders, consumers and citizens associate informally or interact with SSEOs and intermediary organizations in multiple ways. Second, as recognized in ILO Recommendation 204, large swathes of SSEOs lie outside the purview of social protection policies, labour rights, security measures and economic incentives provided by governments (ILO 2015). Third, it is important to factor in the role of informal social norms and social relations associated with cooperation, mutual aid, solidarity and reciprocity. These provide support for those in need and regulate the use and management of common property resources, such as forests and water for the benefit of the community or group. Furthermore, they influence behaviour not only in SSEOs and communities themselves, but in the wider society and economy more generally (Coraggio 2016).

According to the Intercontinental Network for the Promotion of Social Solidarity Economy, known as RIPPES (n.d.):

“

*In SSE, ordinary people play an active role in shaping all of the dimensions of human life: economic, social, cultural, political, and environmental. SSE exists in all sectors of the economy: production, finance, distribution, exchange, consumption and governance. It also aims to transform the social and economic system that includes public, private and third sectors.*

”

## Framing SSE

These observations suggest the need to frame SSE in a way that captures comprehensively its attributes and diversity (see box 1.1). From this perspective, *SSE is a distinct form of economy characterized by a specific set of actors, purposes and principles. It comprises associations, cooperatives, mutual societies, foundations, social enterprises, self-help groups and social movements and networks operating in both formal and informal economy. SSE organizations and enterprises prioritize a combination of social, environmental, democratic and emancipatory objectives. They are guided by principles that emphasize the primacy of people and work over capital, a profit distribution constraint, participatory governance, mutual aid, voluntary cooperation, collective action and local development as key mechanisms for empowerment and well-being.*

While SSE principles set it apart from other forms of economy, it increasingly interfaces with profit-oriented enterprises, public institutions and civil society. Through such interactions, SSE values can permeate the wider economy, polity and society. SSE, therefore, is more than a sector: it is also a vector for societal and systemic transformation.

### Box 1.1 Types of SSEOs

While the definition of different types of entities and how SSEOs are categorized may vary according to different stakeholders and countries, the organizations and enterprises engaged in productive activities, service provision and advocacy associated with SSE generally conform to the following types:

- An **association** is a legal entity principally engaged in the production of non-market services for households or the community at large and whose main resources are voluntary contributions. Associations are member-based organizations that also engage in advocacy on behalf of producers, workers, traders and consumers. They may include trade unions, non-governmental organizations and community-based or grassroots entities (ILO 2022b).
- A **cooperative** is “an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise” (ICA, n.d.). The four main types include: i) producer cooperatives, ii) worker cooperatives, iii) consumer/user cooperatives, including financial cooperatives and iv) multi-stakeholder cooperatives (ILO 2018b). Multi-stakeholder cooperatives (also referred to as social cooperatives) serve the general or public interest in areas related to health, education and culture, rather than solely the interests of members.

- A **mutual society** is a voluntary group of people or an enterprise providing life and non-life insurance services, complementary social security schemes and small value services of a social nature. Through members making periodic contributions to a common fund, their primary purpose is to satisfy common needs while not making profits or providing a return on capital (ILO 2022b; European Commission, n.d.a; European Parliament 2011).
- A **foundation** is an entity that has at its disposal assets or an endowment and, using the income generated by those assets, either makes grants to other organizations or carries out its own projects and programmes (ILO 2022b).
- A **social enterprise** is an organization that has a hybrid character in terms of both the interests it pursues – the general (community) interest, mutual aid and a return on capital – and the mix of market and non-market resources on which it depends. Social enterprises mainly include social or multi-stakeholder cooperatives, entrepreneurial non-profits and firms that have an explicit social mission (Defourny, Nyssens and Brolis 2019).
- A **self-help group** is similar to both a cooperative and a mutual society in that individuals join to accomplish goals of mutual support, such as healthcare and financial support, that would be unattainable on an individual level. Self-help groups differ from both, however, in that they are not principally engaged in commercial activities and many also form part of the informal economy (ILO 2022b).
- A **social movement and a network** connect people and organizations sharing common bonds of purpose and identity. These interconnections, which often link different groups and territories, can have an enabling and empowering effect in terms of resource mobilization and agency (Diani and McAdam 2003). They are a key aspect of alternative food networks, fair trade, complementary currencies, digitalized aspects of the sharing economy, SSE advocacy and participation in the policy process.

Note: Sources cited in the box text are located in the References at the end of this paper.



## 2. ELIMINATING POVERTY AND HUNGER (SDGs 1 AND 2)



**SDG 1**  
***End poverty in all its forms everywhere***



**SDG 2**  
***End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture***

With global poverty rising in 2020 for the first time since the late 1990s and food security threatened by the global health crisis and a number of ongoing wars, the world is even further off track to end poverty and food insecurity by 2030 than it was before the COVID-19 pandemic.

***SSEOs catalyse social transformation by strengthening the productive capacities of vulnerable and marginalized groups and producing goods and services accessible to them, thus helping to achieve the objective of leaving no one behind (SDG 1 & 2).*** SSE yields benefits associated not only with material aspects of poverty reduction and food security, including income, assets such as land, and access to food and social protection, but also other enabling conditions that widen people's choices.


### Multiple pathways to poverty reduction

Calls for “immediate and significant action” (UN 2021) to address this situation would greatly benefit from paying far more attention to the role of SSE in multiple aspects of poverty reduction related to employment, livelihood security and enabling people to choose the lives they value. Indeed, the focus of SSE resonates with key targets under SDG 1, namely, raising the income of the poor, expanding social protection and access to basic services, realizing people's rights to economic resources and strengthening their capacity to cope with shocks and disasters.


While data quantifying the scale of SSE is still limited and only capture a fraction of the SSE universe, research conducted in recent years has shed significantly more light on the contribution of SSE to employment, income generation and people's access to services. As indicated in box 1.1, such data suggest that SSE has attained a scale that can significantly impact poverty reduction. This data suggest that the development and worldwide expansion of SSE in recent decades have provided a potentially powerful infrastructure for poverty reduction. Realizing this potential, however, confronts various



challenges. Producer and marketing cooperatives and microfinance self-help groups, for example, often target low-income members but not necessarily the poorest of the poor. Organizational constraints, such as financial illiteracy, limited managerial and technical know-how, and lack of social capital (trust) and networks can undermine performance and impact. Such conditions often arise in all-too-common settings where SSEOs remain relatively marginalized within public policy agendas.



As discussed below in relation to other SDGs, **SSEOs play a key role in poverty elimination via access to and the right to food, health and care services, education and training, housing, access to finance and advocacy for social protection.** They also build resilience to cope with crisis and shocks, as in the case, for example, of rotating savings and credit associations (ROSCAs), which can act as a lender of last resort, or worker buyouts of failing and bankrupt companies. The SDG target of realizing people's economic rights (target 1.4.) depends crucially on the participation of those concerned via myriad intermediary organizations and networks that represent and advocate on behalf of SSEOs and practitioners.



In contrast to other forms of business organization, **SSEOs are structurally geared towards poverty reduction.** By their very nature they promote equitable access to resources and knowledge, the realization of human rights, as well as the inclusion of individuals and communities who otherwise would be left behind (Schwettmann 2020). They set in motion self-help mechanisms and forms of collective action that simultaneously create opportunities, facilitate empowerment and foster livelihood security and social protection – all key elements in any poverty reduction strategy (World Bank 2000, ILO 2003, ICA 2017). SSEOs expand social protection through multiple means, including mutual assistance, the provision of social services and benefits to workers and users, and advocacy to extend the coverage of state welfare and social security systems.

The contribution of SSE to poverty reduction is apparent not only in the tangible benefits associated with employment, income generation and access to services, but also in the fact that SSEOs and practices (such as mutual support and solidarity) are grounded territorially. This has important implications for poverty elimination: first, SSEOs are well-positioned to respond to local needs and demands; and second, resources are, to a large extent, mobilized and distributed locally. This is key for local economic development (LED). The notion of local economic development relates to a participatory development process that involves private, civil society and public stakeholders engaging in strategies to create jobs, income and productive capacity by basing an activity in a specific location and making use of local resources (Fonteneau et al. 2011). LED and SSE are seen as complementary tools, both of which strive for participatory governance, partnership, empowerment and social and economic inclusion (Foro del Alma 2013).

The territorial anchoring of SSEOs counters the conventional dynamic of resource and profit extraction or capital flight, largely for the benefit of stakeholders external to the area where production occurs. As noted below in relation to SDG 12, territorial grounding also serves to shorten supply chains, which has important implications for energy use and carbon emissions (UNCTAD 2013).

SDGs 1 and 2 focus primarily on aspects of poverty related to income, assets such as land, and basic needs related to food and social protection. Additional material aspects of poverty, including housing and access to finance, are also addressed under other SDGs below. But it is important to recall the broader multifaceted understanding of poverty that gained currency in the 1980s and was subsequently popularized by the series of Human Development Reports published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). This perspective goes well beyond material dimensions (UNDP 1997:15):

**“ Human development is ... a process of widening people’s choices as well as raising the level of wellbeing achieved. If human development is about enlarging choices, poverty means that opportunities and choices most basic to human development are denied—to lead a long, healthy, creative life and to enjoy a decent standard of living, freedom, dignity, self-respect and the respect of others. ”**

The political, cultural and social features of SSE, referred to above, including democratic governance, active citizenship, mutual support, solidarity and a sense of belonging or community, are clearly crucial in this regard.

## Food security and sustainable agriculture

In a context where the world produces enough food to feed everyone, poverty and inequality are the fundamental structural causes of food insecurity and malnutrition, which are the focus of SDG 2. They amplify the negative impacts of a combination of contemporary drivers related to conflict, climate change, economic downturn and the COVID-19 pandemic, which have caused a rise in hunger since 2014 (FAO 2021). Nearly one in three people in the world (2.37 billion) were affected by moderate or severe food insecurity in 2020 (UN 2021), a figure that looks set to rise as a consequence of the war in Ukraine (WFP 2022). According to the UN (2021):

**“ COVID-19 has had a further and profound impact on hunger and food security, triggered by disruptions in food supply chains, income losses, widening social inequities, an altered food environment and price hikes. Between 720 and 811 million people in the world faced hunger in 2020, an increase of as many as 161 million from 2019 ... Even discounting the effects of COVID 19, around 230 million children suffer from malnutrition. Urgent short-term actions are needed to avert rising hunger, and a transformation of food systems is required to achieve a healthy and sustainable food future for all. ”**





Through cooperatives, self-help groups, associations, social enterprises and myriad types of community organizations and practices of mutual support, SSE can play a pivotal role in achieving several targets associated with SDG 2. Beyond ensuring universal access to nutritious and sufficient food (2.1), these include improvements in nutrition (2.2), boosting smallholder incomes and agricultural productivity and promoting equal access to land, inputs, services and markets (2.3); and ensuring the sustainability and resilience of food systems (2.4), as well as genetic diversity (2.5).

Group organization and networks associated with production and marketing cooperatives, self-help groups and community supported agriculture yield multiple benefits related to eliminating hunger and transforming food systems. According to Kitchman (2019), key in this regard are:

- enhanced local and social control of food systems;
- shortened trade circuits;
- greater bargaining power to negotiate better prices and address market failures reflected in deteriorating terms of trade;
- addressing policy failures related to the neglect of agriculture;
- agroecology, biodiversity and greater use of low-input, low-carbon production methods;
- more diversified production and farming systems;
- scope for adding value to primary raw materials;
- reduced costs due to pooling resources and economies of scale;
- productive reinvestment and equitable distribution of surplus;
- local multiplier effects that foster enterprise and community development.



***There is growing interest in the role of SSE enterprises and entrepreneurs in transforming food systems in ways that address the contradictions and imbalances that make them unsustainable.*** Case studies from Europe suggest that a cross-cutting feature is the objective of addressing social and environmental issues in a specific territory, in a way that closely connects entrepreneurship and local development. In contrast to agribusiness models, “clients” are not simply consumers but stakeholders, who are more involved and have a greater sense of responsibility. Very different approaches are involved: in some cases, innovations, for example, upcycling and resource efficiency to reduce food wastage; in others, the preservation of tradition, for example, via low external input agriculture and awareness raising to promote direct farmer to consumer linkages and the consumption of fresh food (Costantini et al. 2019).

***Fair trade and alternative food networks that link producers and consumers can yield multiple benefits*** in terms of the stability and level of producer prices, added-value, gender equality, agroecology, nutritious food, community support, sharing risks and benefits and resilience. Comprising 1,880 Fairtrade certified producer organizations, the fair trade movement involves 1.9 million farmers and workers in 71 countries (Fairtrade International 2021). Beyond assisting farmers by setting a minimum price that safeguards producers when commodity prices are low, buyers also pay a premium above the selling price that cooperatives can use for infrastructure and social development projects. In recent years, the Fairtrade Premium has averaged over US\$200 million annually (Fairtrade International, n.d.). Urban community gardens and family farming and other cooperatives have also played a role in supplying neighbourhood residents with nutritious and affordable food during the COVID-19 pandemic (Azevedo Fonseca et al. 2020).

The agroecology movement, which applies ecological, social and democratic concepts and principles to the design and management of sustainable agriculture and food systems, has witnessed the rapid growth of various forms of local solidarity-based partnerships for agroecology (FAO 2018). Involving primarily community supported agriculture – where the risks and rewards of farming are shared via a long-term binding agreement – such partnerships also include certain types of farmers markets and producer and marketing cooperatives. Data from 27 countries indicate that more than two million consumers, 12,000 groups and 16,000 farms are involved in this movement worldwide, with the vast majority of groups and consumers concentrated in China, Italy, France and the United States (Urgenci 2021).

The above elements make up a people-centred agroecological model that contrasts sharply with the dominant industrial agricultural and food consumption system. Such a system involves value chains controlled by large corporations, carbon intensive high-external input agriculture, long-distance international transport through trade, heavily subsidized farming in many of the richer nations and high levels of food loss and waste (CFS 2014).



**Several major SSEOs and networks that are active in relation to agroecology have promoted a multifaceted approach to local development** that emphasizes land rights and access to other economic resources, redistributive agrarian reform, fair trade, popular education and training, access to public social services, collective organization, social mobilization, and the key role of local knowledge, seed and food production, trade and policymaking (see box 2.1). The concept of food sovereignty captures this holistic approach to a healthy, ethical and just food system (Nyéléni 2007). According to the UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO 2014):

“ *Food sovereignty ... recognizes that control over the food system needs to remain in the hands of farmers, for whom farming is both a way of life and a means of producing food. It also recognizes the contribution of indigenous peoples, pastoralists, forest dwellers, workers and fishers to the food system. It ensures that food is produced in a culturally acceptable manner and in harmony with the ecosystem in which it is produced. This is how traditional food production systems have regenerated their soils, water, biodiversity and climactic conditions, for generations.* ”

Whereas there are obvious benefits, transitioning to an agroecological system requires comprehensive policy and institutional support related, for example, to green and socially responsible public procurement (Tepper et al. 2020), appropriate technology and affordable finance, as well as fair trade and certification mechanisms that boost farmer’s incomes. There is also a need for strong advocacy organizations and networks, and increased bargaining power and influence that come through collective action and participation in the design and implementation of public policies (Agarwal 2014, Partalidou and Anthopoulou 2019, Yi et al. 2019).



## Box 2.1 Adopting a holistic approach: the Landless Rural Workers Movement and ASSEFA

The Landless Rural Workers Movement (MST) in Brazil and the Association of Sarva Seva Farms (ASSEFA) in India, exemplify the importance of a multifaceted approach to rural development.

*Landless Rural Workers Movement (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra)*

Through land occupations legitimized by the 1988 Constitution, the Landless Rural Workers Movement (MST) has extended the reach of SSE in large areas of rural Brazil. It is estimated that nearly 450,000 people have accessed land via the movement. By 2009, the MST was active in 2,000 settlements, 160 cooperatives and 140 agribusinesses. Over time, the organization has adapted and diversified its approach, shifting from conventional agricultural methods to agroecology and multifunctional farming systems, and promoting different types of cooperative practices depending on the circumstances and preferences of land settlers. It also expanded the focus on rural education and training beyond the encampments and settlements to the promotion of education through the public system. Market access has been expanded via the public procurement system and fair trade circuits connecting farmers and urban consumers. To reduce dependence on external funding, MST has developed autonomous sources of financing through cooperatives, credit unions and agribusinesses. In relation to agroecology, MST created, for example, the cooperative, BioNatur. Within a decade, BioNatur became the largest producer of organic seeds in Latin America.

### *Association for Sarva Seva Farms (ASSEFA)*

Concentrated mainly in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, ASSEFA has developed over 50 years into a network of approximately 10,000 ASSEFA villages, involving about five million people. The basic organizing unit are women's self-help groups, initially formed for the purpose of accessing microcredit, many of these groups engage in dairy, crop and seed production, among other activities. The self-help groups are formally organized in Sarvodaya Mutual Benefit Trusts, a legal structure that allows women to have ownership rights in ASSEFA's main microfinance institution. By 2018, ASSEFA had 160 community organizations, of which 113 are mutual benefit trusts, nine are education trusts for managing schools and five are milk processing organizations. By adopting a holistic approach to poverty reduction grounded on Gandhian principles of Sarvodaya (progress of all) and Gram Swaraj (self-governing villages), the scope of ASSEFA's activities extends well beyond access to economic resources to women's health and reproductive rights, means of addressing patriarchal norms, education, tree planting, renewable energy, access to water and adequate housing, culture and spirituality. The experience of ASSEFA, like that of the MST, also illustrates the importance of federated or vertically integrated structures where an apex organization not only provides direct support to grassroots entities but also interfaces with public and private sector institutions to mobilize resources and influence public policy.

Sources: For MST: Carter 2010; Meek et al. 2019; Tarlau 2015. For ASSEFA: ASSEFA 2021, Poirier and Loganathan 2019. Full citations located in References.



# 3. HEALTH AND EDUCATION FOR ALL (SDGs 3 AND 4)



## **SDG 3**

***Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages***



## **SDG 4**

***Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all***

Whether through the direct provision of services or addressing the social and political determinants of health and education, SSE can play a key role in achieving SDGs 3 and 4, aimed at ensuring healthy lives for all, inclusive and quality education and lifelong learning opportunities.

SSE activity is often centred on the provision of services related to health, care, education and training. A survey of SSEOs in eight countries (including Australia, Canada and six European countries) found that those engaged in healthcare and education/training accounted for 26 and 21 per cent, respectively, of the total (Buckingham and Teasdale 2013). Cooperatives, mutual benefit associations, faith-based organizations and foundations have a long history in this area. In Indonesia, for example, the Islamic faith-based organization, Muhammadiyah, operates over 5,000 education establishments and several hundred non-profit medical clinics and hospitals (Muhammadiyah, n.d.). Pharmaceuticals and healthcare cooperatives account for 21 per cent of market share in Spain and 18 per cent in Belgium (Karakas 2019).

In contexts where austerity policies that have affected NGO funding and governments are contracting out welfare services, many NGOs have transitioned to income-generating activities and new forms of multi-stakeholder or social cooperatives have emerged. As a result, the range of social enterprises operating in this area is expanding rapidly (Fonteneau and Pollet 2019, Novkovic 2019).

## **Healthcare services**

This is particularly the case in relation to health and care services in contexts of welfare state reform and aging populations (Roelants and Salvatori 2018), as well as increasing demand for childcare services. Worldwide, an estimated 100 million households access healthcare through 3,300 health cooperatives in 76 countries (UN 2019a). Between 2007 and 2017, the market share of the global mutual and cooperative insurance sector, which covers risks including illness, handicap, infirmity and death, rose to 26.7 per cent



in 2017 (ICMIF 2019). In several countries, health mutuals play an active role in ensuring the functioning of the welfare system and providing additional social and health services. The International Association of Mutual Benefit Societies has members in 28 countries in Europe, Latin America, Africa and the Middle East, serving some 240 million people (AIM, n.d.).

Many cooperatives have recently expanded their activities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Health and pharmaceutical cooperatives in India, Spain, France and Turkey, for example, have adopted measures including training people in prevention, launching public awareness raising campaigns, distributing protective gear for front line workers and working closely with public health system in caring for COVID-19 patients (ILO 2020a). The range of initiatives taken by different types of SSEOs in several Asian countries is illustrated in box 3.1.

### Box 3.1 SSE and COVID-19

Selected responses from SSEOs to the COVID-19 pandemic in China, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines, and the Republic of Korea included efforts to:

- Protect smallholder farmers' food production and keep the food value chain alive with direct cooperative to cooperative trading (agricultural cooperatives in the Philippines), meeting the demand of consumers spending more time at home (Consumer cooperatives, Japan; Good Food Community, Philippines), and using the purchasing power of cooperatives to assist most affected regions (rural supply and marketing cooperatives, China).
- Shift production toward medical supplies like hand sanitizers and face masks and distribute them to high risk populations including front line workers, such as those in health care (Die & Mold Industry Cooperative and iCOOP, South Korea);
- Provide free access to COVID-19 pre-screening, rapid testing and hospital care among the poor, and build temporary care facilities (Dompot Dhuafa Foundation, Indonesia);
- Work with community partners in responding to the growing needs created by school closures as elementary schools are used to provide lunch boxes for disadvantaged children (ZEN-NOH in Japan, and iCOOP, Republic of Korea).
- Provide consultation services and low interest loans to members who are affected by COVID-19 (Rokin Labour Bank, Japan).
- Create fundraising campaigns for COVID-19 relief efforts and support to SSEOs (foundations and social enterprises, Malaysia) or providing both funding for government relief programmes and solidarity finance for primary level cooperatives (Malaysian apex cooperative organization, ANGKASA).
- Promote alternative forms of financing including through foundations to support efforts of cooperatives and other SSE enterprises, including through specific funds to respond to the needs of their workers, businesses and communities (Republic of Korea).

Source: ILO 2021b

The role of both social enterprises and community-based schemes has expanded in countries where governments are reforming welfare systems. This is reflected in specific country contexts in Africa and Europe:

- Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya and Rwanda have introduced community-based health insurance (CBHI) schemes for the extension of health coverage. As in the case of Rwanda, the rapid expansion of such schemes can greatly extend coverage to hitherto underserved populations but can also result in a growing gap between expenditures and revenues (SPARC 2021).
- In French-speaking Africa, the Programme d'Appui aux Stratégies Sociales (PASS, n.d.) aims to extend universal health protection coverage through mutual societies and to support State-led programmes to cooperate with the informal sector, which represents 80 per cent of the population in this region.
- In Spain, the SSE accounts for 43.5 per cent of the total supply of care services involving children, the elderly, people with disabilities and the chronically infirm (Martínez Martín et al. 2019). In the United Kingdom, during the COVID-19 pandemic, over 30 per cent of all National Health Services community nursing and other services were provided by social enterprises (UNECE 2020).


Contemporary social protection models in several African countries, including Ghana, Rwanda and Burkina Faso, have witnessed community-based mutual health organizations emerge as important partners of government in facilitating access to healthcare. Under this approach, community-based organizations, organized in networks or federations, provide crucial services while being supported technically and financially by public institutions within the framework of a national strategy (Fonteneau 2015). Expanding rapidly since the 1990s, such organizations have provided a means of extending health services to informal sector and farming populations.

***From the perspective of achieving the goals of health and education for all, a key question is whether the expanding role of SSE in these sectors is part and parcel of government efforts to strengthen the welfare state and social policy via partnerships with SSE, or whether it is a reaction to policies and reforms associated with austerity and downsizing the role of the State.***

In many countries, SSEOs operate in the context of already well-developed or expanding social protection systems – the case for example of Costa Rica, Uruguay, the Republic of Korea, Rwanda, Burkina Faso and Quebec, Canada, France and Italy where social enterprises, NGOs or community organizations are seen as key partners of government in expanding services and reaching underserved people.



This contrasts with situations where government incentives and regulations have expanded the role of social enterprises, including new forms of social cooperatives, in social service provisioning, but often in contexts of austerity programmes that constrain social spending. The implications of such developments for social service provision can vary considerably by country, as demonstrated in the case of Europe (Borzaga et al. 2020). Social enterprises in countries with traditionally weak welfare provisioning and strong civil commitment – such as Greece and Portugal – have filled important gaps in coverage and subsequently diversified their activities to address community needs and demands. Countries with more developed welfare states, such as Denmark and the United Kingdom, have turned to social enterprises as a substitute for direct public provisioning, contracting out services. Countries such as Bulgaria, Czech Republic and Hungary, with relatively weak public sector and associative traditions, have turned to social enterprises as a form of targeting related to disadvantaged groups. Finally, countries such as Belgium and France, with a well-developed associative sector with strong relations with the public sector, have witnessed NGOs transitioning from non-profits to social enterprises in order to diversify their income base by engaging in commercial market activities.



***Despite the turn to social enterprise within welfare systems, evidence regarding actual impacts and relative performance vis-à-vis other sectors, is often limited.*** A review of the research on health impacts in the advanced economies, noted a range of benefits related to physical and mental health. Benefits related to the social determinants of health, were also apparent: skills development, employability, self-reliance and esteem, reduced stigmatization, particularly of marginalized groups, social capital and improved health behaviours. Nevertheless, there was no available evidence that demonstrated improved performance vis-à-vis public health counterparts (Roy et al. 2014).

## Training and learning

The role of SSE in the field of education and learning is multifaceted. The late Paul Singer, former National Secretary for Solidarity Economy in Brazil, emphasized not only the key role of education and training in SSE development but also the need for a knowledge system involving both technical and value-oriented training (Singer 1996). Very different approaches to SSE-related education all play an important role. They include:

**Cooperative education:** one of the seven core cooperative principles concerns education, training and information: “Cooperatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers, and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their co-operatives. They inform the general public – particularly young people and opinion leaders – about the nature and benefits of co-operation (ICA, n.d.)”



**Popular education:** A focus not only on knowledge and skills but also values, societal and economic alternatives, and education as part of an emancipatory process defines popular education. Adult literacy and learning about the relevance and importance of indigenous and local knowledge, collective action and women’s empowerment are key aspects (Valadez et al. 2019).

**Formal education:** both by directly operating educational establishments and through advocacy and participation in the policy process, SSE has played an important role in integrating disadvantaged people into primary, secondary and tertiary education systems and expanding public school infrastructure, particularly in rural areas. Through advocacy and partnerships, initiatives have emerged in several countries where SSE has become part of the curriculum of schools, colleges and universities.


**Technical training:** An increasing number of SSEOs provide education and training associated with technical aspects of production, marketing and management. While this has long been evident in sectors or areas such as agriculture and financial literacy, cooperatives and other SSEOs are engaging with education and learning associated with developments in the field of information technology, knowledge-intensive industries and digital platforms (ICA 2018). Social enterprises are becoming key providers of such services, in some cases replacing the role hitherto played by grant-dependent NGOs. Universities and business schools in numerous countries provide training courses related to SSE (Socioeco.org, n.d.b.).





***A dynamic area of involvement for SSEOs in many countries currently relates to training associated with work integration.*** Just as governments have sought to engage SSEOs as partners in the provision of health services, the same dynamic is occurring in relation to active labour market policies. The aftermath of both the Asian financial crisis of 1997 and the global financial crisis of 2007–08 saw governments in many countries turning to SSEOs to address issues of unemployment through training and work integration.

Work integration social enterprises (WISEs) exist to provide jobs for people with disabilities and other disadvantaged groups, including the long-term unemployed (Defourney et al. 2019). As the scale and diversity of international migration flows increase, some local governments, particularly in Canada and Europe, are turning to WISEs as a means of integrating migrants (UNRISD 2020, Franco 2019). The mission of WISEs is to employ directly or integrate people back into the labour market and society through a productive activity. In the last two decades, WISEs have become increasingly recognized in many countries, and they now constitute a major focus of policies promoting social enterprise (Nyssens 2006, Cooney 2016).



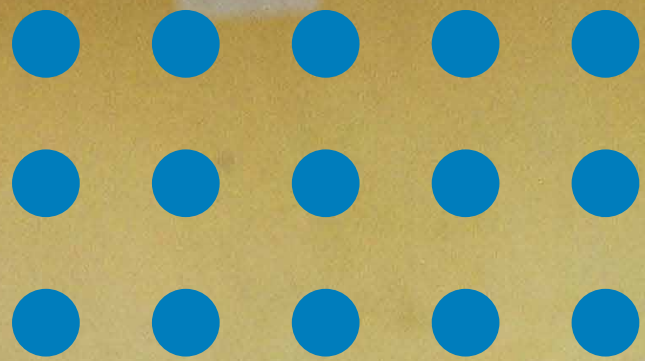
Training associated with WISEs is part of a potentially much broader area of learning related to social innovation education. As has occurred in relation to entrepreneurship education, this area is set to expand considerably in the future (Kalemaki et al. 2019). A key challenge for the future is whether it focuses narrowly on the outputs of social innovation that meet needs and improve capabilities or whether it also emphasizes its transformative and empowering effect via new social relations, socio-political empowerment and democratic and networked governance that can drive social change (Kalemaki et al. 2019, Moulaert et al. 2017). Social innovation education, in turn, requires support via the formal education system. ***Basic learning about solidarity-based social protection and social economy for all in elementary and secondary schools can shape lifetime attitudes conducive to the development of SSE.***

The importance of education and training for the development of SSE concerns not only to SSE practitioners but also public officials. An enabling policy environment for SSE requires considerable attention to knowledge awareness and transfer among policymakers and civil servants. This has been an important feature of SSE development, for example, nationally in Brazil and South Korea, regionally in the European Union and internationally via knowledge sharing forums and platforms like the ILO SSE Academy, the Global Social Economy Forum (GSEF) and digital platforms like socioeco.org.

How SSE relates to education goes beyond sector-specific education and training courses for SSE stakeholders. ***SSE should be included across areas of education so that students at all levels of education learn about it in legal, economic, management, business and social areas.*** Approaches to SSE education, therefore, should be cross-cutting and play into efforts to mainstream the SSE agenda. This would serve to disseminate SSE principles throughout the traditional economy and gain understanding from citizens. This approach resonates with initiatives currently underway to ensure that education systems and curricula are transformed to prepare students to deal with major environmental, economic and social challenges. The OECD (2018) for example, outlines a shared vision in which students learn to:

“*.... abandon the notion that resources are limitless and are there to be exploited; they will need to value common prosperity, sustainability and well-being. They will need to be responsible and empowered, placing collaboration above division, and sustainability above short-term gain.... Education needs to aim to do more than prepare young people for the world of work; it needs to equip students with the skills they need to become active, responsible and engaged citizens.*”

In the face of an increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world, education can make the difference as to whether people embrace the challenges they are confronted with or whether they are defeated by them. And in an era characterized by a new explosion of scientific knowledge and a growing array of complex societal problems, it is appropriate that curricula should continue to evolve, perhaps in radical ways.



## 4. TOWARDS EQUALITY (SDGs 5 AND 10)



**SDG 5**  
***Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls***



**SDG 10**  
***Reduce inequality within and among countries***

SDGs 5 and 10 directly address the issue of inequality, which has become a major political issue globally, particularly in the wake of the global financial crisis of 2007–08 and during the current COVID-19 pandemic. While tackling inequality is central to the 2030 Agenda, it has been identified as one of the areas where progress is particularly weak (UN 2021). Income distribution data for 2021 suggest that the global bottom 50 per cent of the world's population captures just 8 per cent of global income, while the global top 10 per cent earns 52 per cent. Global wealth distribution is even more skewed, with the bottom 50 per cent owning just 2 per cent of total net wealth, whereas the richest half owns 98 per cent. Global multimillionaires comprising the top 1 per cent, captured 38 per cent of all additional wealth accumulated since the mid-1990s, whereas the bottom 50 per cent captured 2 per cent, according to the World Inequality Report (WIL 2022). Indeed, 2020 marked the steepest increase in global billionaires' share of wealth on record, according to the report.

***Via employment and improved access to economic and social services, SSE is well-placed to tackle multiple forms of “horizontal” inequality, associated with ethnicity, race, religion, gender and age, as well as “vertical” inequality related to income and wealth.*** SDG 10 also calls attention to the situation of migrants and people forcefully displaced from their homelands (10.7). This, too, is an area where the SSE is increasingly active (ILO 2020b).

Furthermore, its role in relation to active citizenship and participation in the policy process, means that SSE can proactively engage in the type of policy reform called for under SDG 10 to tackle discrimination and adopt fiscal, wage and social protection policies to progressively achieve greater equality (10.3, 10.4). But achieving the goal of leaving no one behind depends not only on the capacity of the disadvantaged to strengthen capabilities and supportive institutions, but also on limiting the extreme concentration of income, wealth and power in the hands of the few or particular groups.



## A people-centred labour-intensive service economy

*How SSE relates to the goal of reducing inequality extends well beyond material benefits and socio-political dimensions of empowerment; it also concerns the way in which SSE impacts systemic dimensions related to patterns of economic growth and public policy.* Recent research has identified key structural drivers of inequality related to economic growth, the capital-labour relation and the future of work. Concerns have arisen that rapidly rising inequality is now a structural feature of contemporary capitalism, partly due to fiscal policies that favour corporations and wealthy elites, financialization and the capacity of capital to substitute labour, not least in the context of technological change (Piketty 2014).

SSE points to a way out of this situation. *An inclusive and fairer economy and society will depend significantly on expanding more labour-intensive sectors*, not only in traditional areas such as agriculture, but also in what has been called an economy of quality and service, where care, craft and culture assume an increasingly prominent role (Jackson 2018, Jackson and Victor 2018, Jackson 2017). *SSE is structurally geared towards such an economy via such areas as social finance, cultural industries and the provision of health, care and other “proximity” services* (Laville and Nyssens 2000). The notion of service, involving organizations that are embedded in the community, in tune with nature and building capabilities of workers, producers and citizens, represents a very different vision of enterprise from that of firms focused on profit-maximization, shareholder primacy and speculative activity.

Such a transition will also depend on changes in public policy and governance that serve to reallocate public spending and investment towards SSE and social service provision, strengthen the participation of workers and producers in decision-making processes, defend the right to work and other labour rights, and transition from regressive to progressive fiscal regimes. The emphasis within SSE on participatory governance and active citizenship means that SSE stakeholders can play an important role in the coalitions of societal and political actors required to bring about such improvements.

## Empowering women

The persistence of gender inequality is an anomaly in the twenty-first century. Despite decades of advocacy and education, social exclusion, discrimination and violence against women and girls persist. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, women were spending on average 2.5 times as many hours doing unpaid domestic work than men, and the average pay of a woman for an equivalent position remains under that of their male counterparts. *The pandemic exacerbated key aspects of gender inequality, with women assuming a disproportionate share of increased care work at home and job losses.* Furthermore, violence against women and girls has intensified and, despite being at the frontline of treatment and recovery efforts, their rights, priorities and leadership potential are too often not explicitly addressed (UN 2021).

With its focus on both economic and socio-political empowerment, SSE can play an important role in achieving multiple targets under SDG 5. SSEOs enable women to generate a sustainable income and gain skills, as well as the ability to network. The acquisition of new skills through training and mentoring enhances women's employability. Furthermore, compared to conventional enterprises, **SSEOs show a tendency to be more inclusive: they take on initially disadvantaged and vulnerable women at risk of exclusion from the traditional job market** (see box 4.1).

### Box 4.1 Tackling extreme vulnerability and discrimination

Beyond employment and financial services for low-income women, SSEOs are targeting youth and extreme forms of vulnerability and discrimination, as noted in the following cases:

**Brazil:** The Society Amiga e Esportiva do Jardim Copacabana (SAEC) is an SSEOE that works on the improvement of public services provision for poor residents of São Paulo. In 2017, it had 30 agreements with city councils. It also runs a complimentary school and offers courses to prepare young people for the job market (Atados n.d.).

**India:** Sheroes Hangout is a cafe and community, run by survivors of acid attacks. The cafe generates funds to support the Stop Acid Attacks campaign and provides skill development and employment to acid attack survivors working in the café (Kumar 2021).

**Italy:** The BeFree Social Cooperative in Rome provides services, advocacy, training, education, and carries out outreach activities to counter violence against women, gender-based discrimination and trafficking involving women migrants (Beretta et al. 2020).

**Tunisia:** BEITY is an association that provides accommodation, counselling and professional training for work integration to women experiencing homelessness, discrimination and domestic violence (Association Beity 2019).

**United States:** Black Girls Code aims to empower girls of colour to work in STEM fields by introducing them to skills in computer programming and technology. The organization charges a small fee for classes and provides scholarships through grants and sponsorship (BGC. n.d.).

*Note: Sources cited in the box text are located in the References.*



Features of SSE related to collective values and practices, organizational trust, mutual support and participation in governance allow women to actively engage in the economic decision-making process and ensure that their voices are heard. Collective ownership also implies risk-sharing and enhances financial stability, leading to further economic empowerment.

***Core values and principles of SSE related to social and distributive justice, as well as democratic governance and active citizenship, render SSE a potentially important pathway towards gender equality.***

SSE lends itself particularly well to the “intersectional approach” that is needed for effective women’s empowerment – one that simultaneously addresses basic needs, identity and agency. This has been well-documented in the case of women from minority groups experiencing discrimination and refugee populations. Overcoming vulnerability involves not only improved access to resources but also addressing issues of identity related to gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation and age, as well as agency to deal with power structures associated with patriarchy, xenophobia, islamophobia and homophobia (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2017).

It is also important to target the inclusion of women and girls from the most socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, such as the rural poor and forcibly displaced populations. Women often constitute the majority of workers and users associated with certain types of SSEOs, including self-help groups, community forestry groups, community-based mutual health organizations and associations of domestic- and home-based workers. They are also prominent in emerging forms of social enterprise, including social cooperatives, providing social, care and other personal services (see box 4.2).



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**Box**  
**4.2**
**Diversity and inclusion within SSEOs**

Data for Europe indicate that the share of female workers in social enterprises is 70 per cent in Belgium and 67 per cent in France. In Italy, 61 per cent of non-seasonal part-time employees in social cooperatives were women, compared to 47 per cent in other enterprises. An extensive survey of social enterprises in eight other European countries found high levels of diversity among staff and leadership: women made up 59 per cent of management teams, 51 per cent of boards and 62 per cent of the total number of employees. On average, 40 per cent of employed staff were persons with physical or psychological disabilities and 56 per cent were from ethnic minorities (EN 2021). An estimated 47 per cent of UK social enterprises are led by women (Social Enterprise UK 2021).

Women's participation in cooperatives is significant in several sectors. In agriculture, where women have often been under-represented, their numbers are growing, particularly in regions of Africa and Asia where more autonomous cooperatives have emerged in contexts of economic and political liberalization. In some countries, such as India and Nepal, the feminization of agriculture has also witnessed an increase in group farming involving women in varying levels of cooperation and pooling of resources (Sugden et al. 2020). Surveys of different types of cooperatives in three East African countries revealed that women accounted for between 30 and 42 per cent of membership. Significant variations, however, were reported by sector. In Tanzania (United Republic of), women's membership in primary cooperatives across four regions was found to average 20 per cent, while in savings and credit cooperatives (SACCOs) the figure was 43 per cent (Majurin 2012). Globally, women's participation is particularly high not only in SACCOs but also in retail cooperatives (Esim 2021).

*Note: Sources cited in the box text are located in the References.*

Employment in SSEOs can be particularly important for women from low-income households facing labour market discrimination and work-family conflict. SSEOs often provide opportunities for paid work that can be managed alongside responsibilities related to unpaid care work. Moreover, much of the rise of social enterprise has centred on the provision of care and social services that directly impact women's well-being. By easing the care burden assumed by women in the home, SSE childcare centres, for example, can facilitate female participation in the labour force and other economic activities.

The contemporary health crisis related to COVID-19 has had serious implications for the role of SSE in relation to care. While care needs for the elderly have increased and women have had to endure a disproportionate share of increased care responsibilities in the home, the employment of women in care centres has declined as facilities have had to close or reduce service provision (UNECE 2020).

Notwithstanding these impacts, the long-term trend points to the growing importance of SSEOs in care provision in several countries. Beyond the provision of care services, these activities open up paid employment opportunities for both women and men. Expanding women's care work can be useful if

it helps them transition from unpaid to paid care work that is fairly remunerated. Often government efforts to encourage women's integration in the labour market and enterprise development pay little attention to expanding community-based care services, let alone aspects of empowerment related to the need to transform oppressive social relations and cultural norms (Verschuur and Calvão et al. 2018).

Research in recent years has shed light on the role of SSE in women's empowerment, particularly in relation to cooperatives, new forms of social enterprises and self-help groups (see box 4.3). Cooperatives have empowered women economically, improving their access to economic resources, markets, increased productivity and income through pooling resources, economies of scale, sharing risks, increasing bargaining power, developing skills, cooperative networking and access to government and civil society support structures. Clear benefits in terms of improved conditions of work and social benefits, as well as the well-being of children, are also apparent.

While research comparing the performance of SSEOEs and profit-oriented enterprises in relation to gender equality and relevant SDG targets is scarce, recent studies are shedding some light on this question. In Quebec, Canada, where a low-fee universal child care policy exists, the segment of the system operated by non-profit organizations, which account for 35 per cent of children in care, has outperformed for-profit centres on a range of child development indicators (Fortin 2019). A study in Spain found that SSEOEs had comparatively higher female participation levels and lower vertical segregation by sex, generate more resilient and stable employment, and greater chances of full employment. While gender parity in upper management positions was still a long way off, women's participation rate was significantly higher (Castro Núñez et al. 2020). Near gender parity in the leadership of social enterprises in the United Kingdom, contrasts with the 6 per cent of FTSE100 corporations that are led by women and the 18 per cent of SMEs that are majority owned by a woman (Social Enterprise UK 2021).

As women are highly represented in SSE labour markets and as SSEOEs often perform better in terms of wage and leadership gaps in many countries, SSE is well positioned to showcase inclusive principles and practices that can advance gender equality through its emphasis on solidarity and mutuality (OECD, forthcoming-b). But key challenges remain, including:

- Women's disadvantage related to assets, education and training can impede access to the resources and markets needed to establish, expand and sustain an organization.
- Women are in sectors of agriculture, for example fruit and vegetable production, where requirements relating to ownership of land and capital investment may be less onerous but which are at the lower end of the value chain (Wanyama 2014).
- Even though SSEOEs give a voice to their employees, the participation of women within the governance structures and leadership of some cooperative organizations, for example, agricultural and retail cooperatives, does not reflect their participation as members (Schincariol McMurtry and McMurtry. 2015, Esim 2021).

- Public policies and recommendations to promote gender equity need to be carefully crafted, in ways that differentiate women by geographical and institutional setting, as well as by income, ethnicity and race. Very different types of support may be required by different sub-groups (Conde Bonfil 2017).

### Box 4.3 Women's empowerment through self-help groups

In recent decades, self-help groups, usually made up of small groups of 10 to 20 women, have emerged as an important means for accessing finance and other resources in developing countries. Indeed, the scale they have attained in several countries and the diversification of their activities position self-help groups as an important vehicle for achieving multiple SDGs. The objectives and activities of self-help groups often extend well beyond micro-savings and credit. They have become important vehicles for accessing services and awareness-raising related to health, agriculture and nutrition, enterprise training, and overcoming domestic violence and discrimination. They have also served to improve participatory governance by connecting households with community structures and government programmes (Kumar et al. 2021). In several countries, this scaling up and diversification reflects the incorporation of self-help groups into government poverty reduction programmes. In India, for example, millions of self-help groups connect an estimated 50 million households to the DAY-NRLM programme (Government of India, n.d.).

To the extent that female self-help group members participate in decision-making focused on access to resources, rights and entitlements within communities, the members are potentially more empowered (Kumar et al. 2021, De Hoop et al. 2019, Gayatri et al. 2020). Entrenched cultural norms and other factors, however, often limit the scope for women's empowerment. This has been noted in relation to the ability of the poorest of the poor to integrate groups, women's role in decision-making outside of the group, asset ownership, and reduction in violence against women. Research on the impacts of group-based financial services in the Global South reveals that material gains are more evident than those related to empowerment, when understood in terms of the process whereby disadvantaged people gain the ability to make strategic life choices (Bali Swain and Garikipati 2021). These relate to participation and collective action, including the opportunity to break out of a daily routine, discuss issues of common concern, interact with other members and other stakeholders, gain confidence and articulate interests. Such aspects, in turn, are key for enabling SSEOEs and their intermediary organizations to engage in advocacy and participate effectively in the policy process (UNRISD 2018a).

Note: Sources cited in the box text are located in the References.



# 5. DECENT WORK, INNOVATION AND SUSTAINABLE GROWTH (SDGs 8 AND 9)



## **SDG 8**

***Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all***



## **SDG 9**

***Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation***

Central to the paradigm shift envisaged in the 2030 Agenda is the transformation of patterns of economic growth characterized by environmental decline, rising inequality and precarious employment. Achieving this depends on meeting multiple targets under several SDGs, including not only those addressed under SDGs 8 and 9 related to employment generation, informal economy transition, finance, innovation and inclusive and sustainable patterns of industrialization, but also targets noted in other sections of this paper related to SDGs 1, 3, 5 and 16. These include social protection (1.3), universal health coverage (3.8), discrimination against women (5.2) and social dialogue (16.6, 16.7), which is a key component of the social and rights-based dimensions of decent work.

## **Decent work**

By focusing on decent work, SDG 8 addresses several of the major challenges facing countries around the world, namely, an inability to absorb the supply of labour and sub-standard forms of employment characterized by limited pay, job security and social benefits, as well as low job satisfaction. Beyond employment, SDG 8 also calls for progress related to other aspects of decent work, namely, labour rights, social protection and social dialogue (ILO 2017).

SSE can play a crucial role in addressing these challenges (Borzaga et al. 2017). Concerning employment, an estimated 2.9 million cooperatives, with a total membership of 1.2 billion individuals, provide employment to 279.4 million people. They are either directly employed by cooperatives or are integrated in cooperative networks and value chains (Eum 2017). This figure includes 27.2 million persons working in cooperatives (16 million cooperative employees and 11.1 million worker-members), and 252.2 million



self-employed producer-members, mainly in agriculture. A study of 12 countries in Africa estimates that social enterprises accounted for 4.43 million direct jobs in 2020 and that this number could increase to 5.5 million by 2030 (Barran et al. 2020).<sup>1</sup> A 2016 British Council survey of the social enterprise landscape in India estimated that there could be as many as two million social enterprises. According to survey findings, average employment per enterprise amounted to 19 persons; more than half employed disadvantaged groups in their workforce and provided skills training to vulnerable groups; and nearly two thirds worked with the objective of creating employment (British Council 2016). In the European Union and the United Kingdom, cooperatives, mutual societies, associations and foundations were estimated to have a total workforce of 19.1 million in both paid and non-paid employment in 2014/15, equivalent to 6.3 per cent of the total working population (Monzón and Chaves 2016). By 2030, a key objective under the European Union Social Economy Action Plan is to increase this figure to 10 per cent, which corresponds to the creation of 21 million jobs (European Commission 2021).

***Beyond direct employment, and concern for working conditions, SSE can play an important role in relation to social dialogue, labour rights and social protection.***

Through advocacy and alliances with trade unions, political parties and others, intermediary SSEOs and vertically structured SSE networks often engage with the policy process to co-design and co-implement policies and strengthen and expand social protection and labour rights. Some SSEOs, such as the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India, are actually constituted as trade unions. Other prominent examples of intermediary organizations include the following:

- Brazil: Brazilian Solidarity Economy Forum (FBES) and The Rural Landless Workers' Movement (MST) (see box 2.1);
- Indonesia: Bina Swadaya
- Mali: the National SSE Network of Mali (RENAPESS);
- Quebec, Canada: Chantier de l'économie sociale and the Quebec Council for Cooperation and Mutuality;
- Republic of Korea: Korean Social Economy Network
- Philippines: PATAMABA and Homenet Philippines (see box 5.1).

SSEOs typically identify with principles of decent work, even though many may operate under resource-strained conditions that can result in relatively low wages and depend on volunteer labour. Studies comparing the performance of SSE and profit-maximizing firms have noted that the former can out-perform in relation to indicators of job satisfaction, interpersonal relationships, and effective and appropriate supervision (Núñez et al. 2020, Saner et al. 2019). Studies related to work integration social enterprises (WISEs), identify low satisfaction regarding pay but multiple positives related to job satisfaction and meaningful work (Bilbija et al. 2021). While the actual benefits vary for professional employees and the intended beneficiaries of WISEs, such benefits include on-the-job learning, personal and skills development, meaningful relationships with others and higher self-esteem. ***A study comparing***

<sup>1</sup> The 12 countries included Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Morocco, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Tunisia, Uganda and South Africa.

**two platform economy enterprises notes that workers in the platform cooperative had a greater sense of achievement, responsibility, opportunity and ownership.** While both under-performed in relation to work-related benefits, the profit-motivated enterprise out-performed the cooperative platform on pay. The longevity and scalability of the platform cooperative model was also in question given the profit-making constraint (Saner et al. 2019).

## The future of work

SSE can play an important role in addressing challenges associated with the future of work. These include declining employment related to automation and digitalization, the de-regulation of labour markets and youth unemployment, among others (Borzaga et al. 2017, Fonteneau and Pollet 2019). This is due not only to the fact that SSEOs often operate in more labour intensive sectors, less prone to automation, but also because several such sectors are expanding rapidly as demand for services increases, for example, in the care economy and the cultural and creative industries, among others.

SSEOs are well-positioned to expand and compete in these sectors. **Their local anchoring enables them to identify and respond to unmet and emerging needs.** As they are not oriented towards maximizing profits, and because the users of their services often constitute primary stakeholders, they can minimize market failure that can arise where conventional private sector providers adopt opportunistic and exploitative behaviour. **Furthermore, SSEOs can operate in low-profit activities given that the remuneration of invested capital is not a priority and volunteer work and altruistic motives can play a role in reducing labour costs** (Borzaga et al. 2017). This partly explains why SSEOs can fill gaps in public service provision that have arisen in contexts where governments face budget constraints.

The rapidly expanding digital platform economy poses both challenges and opportunities for SSE. **Digital labour platforms are often characterized by low wages and unfair terms of work and employment. Cooperative business models are emerging as an important means of addressing such problems.** In Argentina, Kenya and the United Kingdom, for example, technology professionals with high bargaining power have adopted cooperative models to attain economies of scale and enable access to skill development and financial services. Trade unions and worker cooperatives in the Global North have put forward models in the ride-hailing sector for the creation of a worker-owned data commons. In the Global South, SSEOs are setting up e-commerce marketplaces. In Argentina, China, India and Malaysia, some cooperative federations, cooperative banks and social enterprises are adapting by enabling their member organizations to operate via platforms. While platform workers in less visible sectors generally remain unorganized, collective action for advocacy and social dialogue involving both trade unions and independent grassroots collectives is gaining momentum, as is alliance-building among platform workers across these different sectors (ILO 2021c).

## Enabling inclusive economic growth at scale

SSE can promote more inclusive patterns of economic growth as it expands and through its relations with the private sector. The vertical integration of cooperatives and mutual societies has long played a role in both scaling and ensuring that value added is retained in the sector (Schwettmann 1997, Schwettmann 2022). More recently, the replication of SSEOs has been fuelled by welfare system reforms, innovations in social financing and public policies favouring social enterprise.

***SSE can impact at scale not only through replication and vertical integration but also by being an enabler, originator or the foundation of inclusive business models.*** Such models can provide goods, services and livelihoods on a commercially viable basis, either at scale or in a scalable manner, to people living at the base of the economic pyramid. They become part of the value chain of companies' core business as suppliers, distributors, retailers, or customers (G20 Development Working Group 2015). In the absence of SSE enterprises, it is often harder for commercial businesses to enter and develop an inclusive market. For instance, in India, cooperatives and farmer producer organizations have played a critical role in the development of commercially successful dairy and grape sectors that are inclusive of farmers (Gulati et al. 2022).

## Informal economy transition

***SSE holds considerable promise as a means of tackling decent work deficits within the informal economy and facilitating transition to a fairer, more inclusive and sustainable formal economy.*** Cooperatives have long played an important role in informal economy transition in the agricultural sector, resulting in significant gains in employment, working conditions, productivity and livelihood security. The scale of informal employment within the non-agricultural sectors is also vast, accounting for over 80 per cent in South Asia, approximately two-thirds in sub-Saharan Africa and South-East Asia, and half in Latin America (ILO 2013b).

The role of SSE in informal economy transition centres on three key dimensions. First, from food to finance and micro-insurance, SSEOs can enhance access to affordable essential goods and services on which the well-being and economic activities of informal economy workers and their families depend. Second, intermediary SSE organizations, such as associations of waste pickers or domestic and home-based workers, advocate on behalf of informal economy workers as noted in box 5.1. Third, by joining together in ***SSEOs, workers, producers and traders can mobilize resources, access markets, negotiate fairer prices and participate in the policy process in ways that can generate more secure forms of employment and livelihood security.*** The low capital requirements needed for forming certain types of cooperatives and social enterprises can be beneficial for informal workers seeking to engage in enterprise activities. The experience of waste pickers in Brazil, self-help groups in India and women in mutual health organizations in West Africa illustrate that collective organization is also important for social protection via access to public welfare and social security systems.



Trade unions are increasingly playing an important role in facilitating informal economy transition towards SSE. Key forms of collaboration include partnerships with organizations of informal economy workers aimed at establishing SSEOs and collaboration aimed at organizing, representing and providing services and other support to informal economy workers (ILO 2022d).

Hybrid organizations, blending both formal and informal organizational and regulatory features, have also expanded and diversified. In several African countries, for example, farmers' groups, farmers' clubs, producers' associations or informal economy associations, mutual health benefit societies, community-based health insurance and member-based microfinance institutions have gained recognition in law but do not have to meet the administrative and regulatory requirements that govern cooperatives and non-governmental organizations, among others (Awortwi 2018; Schwettmann, 2021).

## Box 5.1

### Cooperation among workers in the informal economy: PATAMABA and Homenet Philippines

In the late 1980s, efforts to organize self-employed and sub-contracted women workers led to the founding of PATAMABA, the National Network of Informal Workers in the Philippines. With over 19,000 members and 276 chapters in 34 provinces, PATAMABA engages in advocacy to extend labour rights and social protection to home-based workers. PATAMABA also played a key role in the creation of Homenet Philippines, a broad coalition of 23 informal economy workers groups and NGOs, established in 2006, that seeks to empower home-based workers through greater visibility and representation in governmental decision-making bodies both at the local and national levels.

Both PATAMABA and Homenet Philippines have established several SSE initiatives. These include the Homenet Producers Cooperative, the PATAMABA Housing Association in Angono and production clusters organized by PATAMABA WISE (Workers in the Informal Sector Enterprise), the economic arm of PATAMABA. Producers can sell via direct marketing channels with municipality employees and consumers in the local community, as well as through the Homenet Producers Cooperative. PATAMABA has also developed an independently run microfinance system with savings and mutual aid components. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, PATAMABA WISE, with support from Homenet Philippines, has conducted donation campaigns for food, medicines, and other basic needs; produced face masks, hand sanitizers and personal protective equipment (PPE); shifted to food production, developed community gardens and promoted online marketing.

Sources: ILO 2021, Ofeneo 2019, RIPESS. 2021a. Full citations are located in the References.

## Social and solidarity finance



Targets under SDGs 8 and 9 related to financial services and innovation are central to scaling up the role of SSE in transformational change. ***SSE fills major gaps in access to affordable finance that affect small-scale enterprises and low-income groups, but also structure a more stable, resilient and democratic financial system.*** SSE encompasses ethical banking, financial cooperatives, community development banks, solidarity microfinance, complementary currencies, community-based savings, credit and loan schemes, Islamic finance, participatory budgeting and crowdfunding. Social impact bonds and some strands of impact investing are also interfacing more with certain types SSEOs (British Council and UN ESCAP 2021, Barco Serrano et al. 2019).

The financial ecosystem with which SSE is associated comprises numerous instruments. Some derive from the non-profit and collective nature of SSE itself: donations, capital contributions from members, reinvestment of surplus, complementary currencies, community savings and loan schemes, NGO involvement in microfinance, among others. Financial services provided by SSEOs are key to inclusive and sustainable development given their capacity to democratize access to finance, instil values of solidarity into the financial sphere, and foster local and community development and cohesion (Matheï 2015). Financial cooperatives have also proven to be resilient in contexts of economic and financial crisis (Birchall 2013, Sanchez Bajo and Roelants 2011).

Many schemes operate on a scale that significantly impacts development. More than 84,000 credit unions, for example, operate in 118 countries, with 375 million members and US\$3.2 trillion in assets (WOCCU 2020). In sub-Saharan Africa, nearly 100 million people use community-based savings methods. An estimated 50 million people in India, mainly women, access financial mechanisms associated with self-help groups. The scale and outreach of these entities suggests that they demand far greater attention within the financing for development agenda (UN 2015).

Beyond services and instruments provided by SSEOs and institutions themselves, public and private sector sources of funding have expanded and diversified considerably in some countries. Increasing government support has opened up multiple avenues of finance. Driving this expansion is the rise of ethical banking, socially responsible investment and public policy support related to poverty reduction programmes, welfare state reform and initiatives to promote work integration and social innovation.

The European Union has been particularly active in this regard. The European Commission's Social Business Initiative, launched in 2011, has mobilized both private and public funding for social enterprise. The European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation has enabled social enterprises to support the development of the social investment market with €85million and facilitated their access to finance through quasi-loan instruments between 2014 and 2020. The EU Structural Funds were also reformed to enable Member States to earmark structural funds to finance social enterprises (European Commission 2015).

***SSE is increasingly accessing hybrid forms of financing involving both private and public loans, state subsidies and grants and private donations while reinvesting net earnings*** (Barco Serrano et al. 2019).

In recent decades, public sector engagement with SSE has resulted in a wide portfolio of regulatory and support measures (Barco Serrano et al. 2019, Jenkins et al. 2021, Utting 2022). These include:

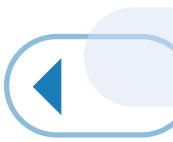
- direct financial support for SSEOs via grants, subsidies and concessionary or flexible financing, as well as co-financing arrangements with private banks and matching grants;
- indirect support via loan guarantees, capitalization of loan intermediaries, social and green bonds;
- regulations that facilitate access to banking and micro-finance institutions and the use of other mechanisms, including crowdfunding, complementary currencies, social impact investing and Islamic finance.

Social and solidarity finance faces several challenges that need to be addressed for SSE to play a major role in development financing and transformational change. Key issues include the following:

- Financial literacy and lack of awareness regarding finance options remain significant problems for many SSEOs. Despite increasing policy commitment to support social enterprise development and social innovation, start-ups often find it difficult to access funding (see box 5.2).
- Some financial mechanisms have not been able to reach the poorest segments of the population, especially women.
- SSEOs can face onerous loan conditions and mechanisms to recoup loans, as has occurred in relation to some forms of microfinance in a number of countries (Bateman 2010).
- Less formalized schemes such as ROSCAs are often the only saving system available in developing countries but, as the lender of last resort, can be vulnerable to external shocks (Matheï 2015).
- Complementary currency schemes often emerge in times of economic crisis and wane once economic recovery occurs.
- Ethical banking and impact investing tend to target commercially oriented social enterprises rather than cooperatives, and often assess performance more on the basis of financial indicators rather than a comprehensive set that includes social, environmental and democratic governance indicators (Novkovic 2022).

Government schemes that provide financial incentives for social innovation via social enterprises and entrepreneurship can encourage the growth of organizations that lack key assets and know-how, while the schemes themselves may lack means to measure and monitor performance and apply selection criteria that restrict entry (Akhtar et al. 2017).

It is important to note that problems of access to credit depend not only on demand-side deficiencies related to SSEOs themselves, but also supply-side deficiencies related to credit institutions and financial intermediaries, which lean heavily on standardized for-profit criteria. The problem cannot be solved without a more articulated vision (Barco Serrano et al. 2019).



SSEOs that are drawn into mainstream financial circuits need to guard against mission drift, reflected, for example, in a weakening of both the profit distribution constraint and participatory decision-making. Social enterprises that require substantial investment capital to expand their activities are particularly prone to mission drift. Increasingly, they are adopting hybrid structures – as both non-profits and for-profit social enterprises, which can access a broader range of financing mechanisms, including donations, grants, bank credit and investment capital. In India, for example, the social enterprise Industree, has developed partnerships with IKEA and others, drawing on both philanthropic and investment capital. This has enabled the enterprise to significantly scale up its activities with artisans to supply the growing national and international markets for consumer products that are not only eco-friendly but also produced by social entrepreneurs (Acumen and IKEA, n.d.).

## Social innovation

Increasing governmental financial support for SSE is occurring in a context where social innovation is recognized as key for inclusive and sustainable growth and employment generation. Social innovation is often interpreted from the perspective of entrepreneurship, enterprise development or business with a social purpose. It can also emerge from a multi-stakeholder or collective process at the local level in order to address unsolved social problems and to empower people economically, socially and politically (Petrella and Richez-Battesti 2014, Moulaert et al. 2013, Kalemaki et al. 2019).

Financing associated with social innovation is fundamentally a systemic issue: its success rests on the presence of an enabling institutional ecosystem and multiple assets, including technology, human and social capital, knowledge, data, infrastructure, policies and regulations, supportive institutions and partnerships (Akhtar et al. 2017; EN, n.d.). In countries like the Republic of Korea and Italy, or regions like Kerala, India, Quebec, Canada, Wallonia, Belgium and the Basque Country, Spain, this type of enabling environment has underpinned the scaling up of SSE.

During the past decade, governments and supranational institutions have increasingly emphasized the importance of social innovation for addressing social problems and reconfiguring the roles of the State, the private sector and the so-called Third Sector. The potential of social innovation to contribute to economic and community resilience has been particularly accentuated during the COVID-19 pandemic. In attempts to “build back better”, countries’ recovery strategies have promoted social innovation to drive systemic and transformative change to address longstanding social and environmental challenges (OECD 2021a).

The European Commission Expert Group on Social Entrepreneurship (GECES) has highlighted three key fields of innovation where social enterprise can increase its role. In addition to that of “inclusive business”, where for-profit enterprise pursues a social purpose, GECES (2016) includes the circular economy (addressed under SDG 12 below) and the so-called collaborative economy:

“

*Social entrepreneurs have the potential to trigger a great number of important initiatives in this field thanks to their deep territorial roots and their ability to reinforce social links. However, as with any kind of economic practice, the collaborative economy can be engaged to benefit just a few, or for the improvement of society as a whole. Social enterprises are currently lagging behind when it comes to engaging with the collaborative economy. There is a window of opportunity, but governments at the national, regional and local levels need to help the social economy and social enterprises become frontrunners in this area.*

”

## Box 5.2

### Funding SSE Start-ups

As the attention of policymakers turns increasingly to social innovation and social impact in emerging sectors and forms of economy, it is important to create enabling environments for start-ups. SSE enterprises and young social entrepreneurs often find themselves at a major disadvantage when seeking funding for the multiple phases of start-up development. These range from developing an initial idea, through testing and validation, to market access and sustaining or growing the operation. The involvement of investors at the seed financing phase is particularly critical but the very nature of SSEOs as multi-purpose entities that are not focused primarily on profitability or rapid short-term growth, means they are ignored by venture capitalists and most impact investors. Even public funding is often not fit for purpose. While it is expanding for already established SSEOs – for example, worker buy-outs of “recovered factories” or those providing social services – start-ups are often disadvantaged, in part due to strict selection criteria, conditions related to matching funds and the amount of public funds available.

Potentially, SSE institutions themselves, including ethical banks, mutuals and cooperatives, could facilitate social innovation via start-ups. A major challenge, however, is that these institutions often prioritize very specific types of SSEOs and SSE activities, which may not align with the entrepreneurial or enterprise nature of start-ups and the new sectors in which they are involved. For SSE to become a significant player in social innovation and the future of work it is imperative that impact investors, public investment and institutional investors associated with SSE adjust their preferences and practices.

Sources: Fabre 2022, Barco Serrano et al. 2019, Jenkins et al. 2021.



# 6. SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND SETTLEMENTS (SDGs 6 AND 11)



## SDG 6

**Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all**



## SDG 11

**Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable**

The local anchoring of SSEOs, as well as their role in participatory governance and the provision of essential services, makes them key partners in achieving SDGs 6 and 11. **Cooperatives, social enterprises and community-based organizations all have considerable potential for building sustainable cities and settlements and ensuring more circularity in the economy.** This is particularly apparent in relation to social housing, waste collection and recycling, care services, cultural activities and community supported agriculture – all areas where SSE has a strong presence. More generally, this potential stems from attributes of SSE related to livelihood security, community cohesion and renewal, enterprise development and low-carbon forms of production and consumption, as well as the participation of SSEOs in local and national governance that regulates urban development.


Four outcome targets under SDG 11 provide a useful lens for examining how SSE contributes to building sustainable cities and settlements. These include housing (11.1), participatory urban management (11.3), cultural heritage (11.4) and waste management (11.6) as well as the goal of improving access to safe and affordable water services under SDG 6.

## Access to drinking water

In a context where access to affordable drinking water remains a major challenge, it is necessary to consider alternative forms of provisioning. Despite a gradual increase in the proportion of the world's population using safely managed drinking water services, some 2 billion people lacked such access in 2020 (UN 2021). **In several countries, water cooperatives and community organizations play an important role in facilitating access to safe and affordable services.**



In much of Europe and the United States, water cooperatives service less densely populated areas. In Denmark, for example, 2,500 water cooperatives provide water services to 40 per cent of the population. An average-sized cooperative supplies between 400 to 600 households (Pietilä, Katko and Arvonen 2016). In Austria and Finland, water cooperatives service around 12 to 13 per cent of the population. Nearly 3,300 water cooperatives in the United States are consumer-owned utilities that provide water for drinking, fire protection and landscape irrigation. Many also provide wastewater services (University of Wisconsin, n.d.).



**Cooperatives and community organizations have also facilitated access to water services in areas experiencing rapid rural to urban migration.** The Bolivian city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, for example, experienced soaring population growth in the 1970s that led to increased demand for an efficient water service. In 1979, the national government approved the request of the autonomous water board to become a cooperative. Since then, SAGUAPAC has become the largest urban water cooperative in the world, with 183,000 water connections serving 1.2 million people out of a total population of 1.6 million (Ranicki, n.d.).

In Costa Rica, associations, known as ASADAS, organize water and sanitation systems, supplying water to a quarter of the population (Utting and Morales 2016). A key feature of the Costa Rican social model has been the involvement of community organizations in service provision in partnership with the public sector. An extensive network of some 3,400 community development associations (Asociaciones de Desarrollo Comunal – ADC) are an important mechanism for channelling State resources for infrastructural development (for example, water, sanitation, roads, electricity, socio-cultural centres, social service provisioning and housing).

## Adequate affordable housing

In a context where an estimated 1.8 billion people lack adequate housing, where private developers and investors increasingly dominate the housing market, and where the notion of housing as a human right has been sidelined by treating it as a commodity, there have been calls for a fundamental rethink in urban development and housing strategies. According to the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing (UN 2019b):

“

*The present global housing crisis .... raises unique challenges for the implementation of the right to housing. Tinkering around the edges of an unsustainable model of economic development will not work. The right to housing must be implemented in a manner that changes the way housing is currently conceived, valued, produced and regulated.*

”



As articulated in the New Urban Agenda, agreed at Habitat III in 2016, international norms regarding inclusive and rights-based urban development increasingly recognize the role of SSE (UN 2017). **Various SSEOs, including housing cooperatives and neighbourhood associations, have long played an important role in improving access of low-income populations to adequate and affordable housing.** Indeed, in the Republic of Korea, the slum dwellers movement was instrumental not only in the field of social housing but also as a driving force behind the rise of SSE, more generally, in the capital city, Seoul (UNRISD 2018b). Social enterprises are now active in improving housing, with 177 housing welfare self-sufficiency enterprises operating nationwide. These enterprises are closely connected to the public social protection system in terms of employing and servicing welfare beneficiaries (Fonteneau and Pollet 2019).

Social enterprises are increasingly involved in retrofitting homes to improve eco-efficiency and transition to renewable energy. Some are also active in bringing together the multiple actors and institutions that need to coalesce, particularly at local and sub-national levels, to promote retrofitting and other aspects of sustainable and just transition. In the United Kingdom, for example, the charity/social enterprise Bioregional is mobilizing multiple stakeholders in five regions to develop a shared agenda for eco-communities and sustainable cities (Bioregional 2021).

**Around the world, various schemes have emerged to increase the affordability of urban housing for lower income groups.** They include, for example, tenant-owned housing cooperatives, cooperative land societies, mutual home ownership housing societies run by large service cooperatives, and community land trusts. Drawing originally on the village land gift movement in India, community land trusts have spread in the United States and are emerging in Australia, Belgium and the United Kingdom. By removing land from the market and placing it under the stewardship of community trusts, one of the major cost elements in urban housing is removed, thus increasing the affordability of housing for lower-income groups. There are an estimated 277 community land trusts in the United States and more than 500 in England and Wales (CLT, n.d.; Community-Wealth.org, n.d.). Interest on the part of local governments is growing in contexts where fiscal deficits constrain public housing subsidies (Miller 2015).

## Waste collection and recycling

**A rapidly expanding area of SSE and the circular economy in recent decades involves workers involved in waste collection, selection and recycling** (OECD and European Commission 2022). It is estimated that up to 20 million people worldwide are engaged in informal waste-picking activities (ILO 2013a). Several million have organized in thousands of organizations in more than 28 countries that are loosely grouped under the Global Alliance of Waste Pickers. Organizations representing waste pickers, such as SEWA in India and those affiliated to the National Movement of Recyclable Waste Pickers in Brazil, have reached agreements with local authorities to collect, select and recycle waste. Such arrangements can significantly improve incomes, working conditions and occupational health, as well as yield positive outcomes related to the efficiency of waste collection, cost-savings for local authorities and the sustainable use of resources (Oates et al. 2018, Dias 2018).

## Participatory urban planning and management

*A common feature of all the above activities concerns the degree of participation of SSEOs in urban planning and management via advocacy and direct participation in multi-stakeholder or other forums.*

In Belo Horizonte, for example, organizations of waste pickers have actively shaped the design, implementation and monitoring of the integrated recycling system. They are formal partners of the municipal authority and other civil society organizations that participate in the multi-stakeholder Municipal Waste and Citizenship Forum, created in 2003 (Dias 2016). In Costa Rica, several thousand communal development associations are organized in 88 unions that coalesce under the national confederation, Confederación Nacional de Asociaciones de Desarrollo Comunal (CONADECO). While relations with government have varied significantly under different administrations, recent poverty and crime reduction programmes have re-energized participatory governance, both in relation to the policy process coordinated by the National Directorate for Communal Development (DINADECO), the government entity overseeing communal development, and the multi-stakeholder National Council for Communal Development, which oversees the allocation of funding for community development associations that derives from a 2 per cent income tax (MTSS 2021, Utting and Morales 2016).

Participatory governance has been a key feature underpinning the success of other initiatives, for example, work integration in France and care services in Quebec, Canada. In France, multi-stakeholder governance structures were established to stimulate local development. Recognized by law in 2014,



some 100 Territorial Poles of Economic Cooperation (Pôles territoriaux de coopération économique) bring together different organizations in a given territory, such as commercial enterprises, local public authorities, research and training centres and SSEOs, to develop innovative and collaborative projects to foster sustainable local development. These poles adopt certain features of clusters but integrate SSEOs within a multi-stakeholder governance framework (Fraisie et al. 2016, European Commission 2021c).

In Quebec, the important role played by SSEOs in the province's extensive childcare system owes much to the participatory governance model. It also demonstrates that participation need not only involve formal structures; it can also be effective via institutionalized informal interactions. In the case of Quebec, large SSE umbrella organizations are key interlocutors, including Chantier de l'économie sociale and the Conseil québécois de la coopération et de la mutualité (Quebec Council for Cooperation and Mutuality) (Mendell, Neamtan and Yi 2020).

## Cultural heritage and practices

SDG 11 emphasizes the cultural dimension of inclusive and sustainable development via the call to strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage (11.4). This, in turn, reinforces the target under SDG 4 related to education that promotes a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development (4.7).

Myriad aspects of SSE aim to safeguard and promote cultural values and practices that are essential for both people's well-being and planetary health. Indeed, the objectives and outcomes of SSE and culture overlap considerably. According to a progress report on SDG 11 by the UN (2018):

“

*Culture promotes social cohesion and intercultural dialogue, creates a collective identity and sense of belonging, encourages participation in political and cultural life and empowers marginalized groups.*

”

In relation to SSE, the cultural connection is often made in relation to easily recognized repositories of culture, be they handicrafts, sustainable tourism or the natural resource management practices and local knowledge of indigenous peoples. Increasingly, attention is being directed to the role of SSEOs, notably social enterprises in the cultural and creative industries as avenues for innovation, growth and enterprise and job creation (British Council n.d., ILO 2021d). Particularly relevant are collaborative network platforms associated with the ICT-based sharing economy and the digital commons (Roh 2016). The scope for blending social and economic value via these new forms of economy, and the role of cooperatives and social enterprises within them, has been well documented and are now being studied by the United Nations Economist Network under the New Economics for Sustainable Development project (Borzaga, Salvatori and Bodini 2017; British Council, n.d.).



While SSE and culture are intimately connected, the linkages are often minimized. This is partly due to the increasing focus on both the utilitarian purpose of SSE for material well-being and formal sector organizations and enterprises that produce measurable outputs. This perspective runs the risk of sidelining other aspects of culture, which has been defined by UNESCO (2009): “as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, that encompasses, not only art and literature, but lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs.” It is important that attention to utilitarian and formal economy aspects of SSE does not detract from less tangible and more informal dimensions, ranging from mutually supportive social bonds to philosophical worldviews centred on harmony and well-being.

In Asia, for example, religious and philosophical ideals and community and indigenous practices resulted in forms of cooperation, solidarity, mutual aid, reciprocity, respect for common property and the environment (ILO 2021b) (see box 6.1). Such traditions may have weakened over time but informal cooperative, reciprocal and solidaristic relations remain a fundamental aspect of SSE.

**Box  
6.1**

**The cultural roots of SSE in six Asian countries**

Rooted in the history and culture of China, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines and the Republic of Korea are different forms of cooperation, solidarity and mutual aid. The origins of SSE can be traced to these aspects of traditional culture and social ethics. They include:

- Gotong Royong, a moral and cultural tradition of people’s solidarity and cooperation in Indonesia and Malaysia;
- Principles of Shariah law within Islamic culture in Malaysia and Indonesia, which promote social justice and fair economy and underpin philanthropic and social finance institutions;
- Bayanihan, Damayan and Pagtutulungan, traditional cultures of co-work, fundamental respect for mutual dignity and active practice of mutual help in the Philippines;
- Sasaeai and Tsunagari, moral traditions and social ethics for mutual help based on the fundamental interconnectedness of people in community life in Japan;
- Dure, Kye, Hyang Yak, Pumashi, traditional mutual-help organizations in the Republic of Korea;
- The tradition of pluralistic culture to pursue individual dignity with social harmony in China.

Source: ILO. 2021b.

**Another core feature of SSE relates to cultural and ethnic diversity and the rights, values and practices of indigenous peoples.** Indigenous peoples' organizations and movements are key constituents of SSE. In Indonesia, for example, the Association of Indigenous Women of The Archipelago (Perempuan Aman) works to strengthen the capacity of indigenous women to voice their own interests. It is a wing of the Indigenous Peoples Alliance of the Archipelago (AMAN), which engages in lobbying, strengthening the institutional and organizational capacity of member communities, cooperatives and other organizations. It promotes their political participation, providing legal services often related to land conflicts, mapping of indigenous territories to be able to claim land rights, developing indigenous based forestry and community-owned enterprises, among other activities (Perempuan Aman, n.d.).

In the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Ecuador, the indigenous notion of living in harmony with people and nature, which also recognizes the importance of collective and communitarian concerns and forms of organization, has been influential in social mobilization, advocacy, law and enterprise development (Wanderley, Sostres and Farah 2015, Villalba-Eguiluz et al. 2020). In Bolivia (Plurinational State of), for example, CIDOB (*Confederación de Pueblos Indígenas del Oriente Boliviano*) has played a key role in the institutionalization of indigenous rights and the Buen Vivir philosophy, discussed in the following section.



# 7. GREEN AND FAIR TRANSITION (SDGs 7, 12 AND 13)



## **SDG 7**

***Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all***



## **SDG 12**

***Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns***



## **SDG 13**

***Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts***

Achieving goals associated with sustainable growth and planetary health depend crucially on transforming consumption and production patterns. While this is the central focus of SDG 12, it is also an aspect of several other SDGs, including SDG 7, related to sustainable energy for all and SDG 13, which aims at improving human and institutional capacity for climate change mitigation, adaptation and impact reduction (13.3). SSE has much to contribute to current efforts to promote the green economy, or what is increasingly referred to as “just transition” (UNDP 2020, ILO 2021e).

Positioning SSE more centrally in green economy transitions, and SSE actors in related policy processes, is particularly important in this regard. ***Operating with a light environmental footprint is part of the DNA of SSE.*** Environmental awareness ranks high among the portfolio of values adhered to by many SSEOs. This is particularly evident among community groups and producer organizations engaged in sustainable forestry, fair trade or that form part of the movement and networks calling for food sovereignty, such as the global association, La Via Campesina. It has also been a central feature of SSE in regions of Latin America that adhere to the philosophy of Buen Vivir that attaches a high priority to the rights of nature. Indigenous groups have historically adopted social norms that protect common property resources. More recently, SSEOs are playing an active role in promoting a green and just transition through their engagement in circular value chains and circular business models based on proximity and collaboration (OECD 2022).



Much remains to be done, however, to ensure that environmental objectives rank alongside social objectives within the preferences of SSEOs. Many cooperatives arose long before the contemporary era of environmental awareness and are now adapting to international cooperative norms promoting sustainable development. A major challenge relates to social enterprises that have been established for an explicit social purpose only. A survey of social enterprises in the United Kingdom found that while 67 per cent had embedded tackling climate change into their articles of association, or were planning to do so, only 20 per cent were currently addressing the climate emergency as part of their core mission. This research shows that many are receptive to new environmental norms and innovations but require knowledge and technical and financial support in order to adapt their practices (Social Enterprise UK 2020).

As noted under section 2 above, in line with the SDGs, SSEOs often adopt a more integrated or holistic approach to development that simultaneously addresses social and environmental objectives, among others (see box 2.1). Structurally they are not designed to constantly grow on the basis of extractivism and an ever-expanding throughput of raw materials. Neither are they geared towards maximizing profits, which is achieved in part by externalizing environmental costs related to pollution and waste (Millstone 2015). Furthermore, the fact that SSE is to a large extent centred on territorial, relatively short, production and trade circuits also implies significant environmental benefits. According to the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA 2021):

“

*Through their ownership structures and dedication to members, cooperatives have an enormous advantage in their resistance to short-termism, their preservation of assets and (indivisible) reserves, and hence consideration of future generations. The structural ownership features of cooperatives and their adherence to the principle of ‘one member one vote’ ensures that they remain committed to their missions and purpose, encouraging value creation over value extraction.*

”

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Important is not only the scale and diversity of SSEOs at the local level, but also that they represent an approach to sustainability that is fundamentally different to market- and corporate-led approaches. Beyond the issue of ‘greenwash’, mainstream green economy initiatives often centre on technological fixes and commodifying and assigning private property rights to nature. Such approaches can reinforce the uneven distribution of costs and benefits (Cook, Smith and Utting 2012). They also focus heavily on reducing resource intensity – so-called ‘relative decoupling’ –, rather than absolute decoupling that



ensures that carbon emissions fall not only in relation to output but in absolute terms (Jackson 2009). Furthermore green economy policies are prone to being designed ‘from above’, without sufficient input from local knowledge and development actors (Cook and Smith 2012). The challenge, therefore, is to promote transitions that are green, inclusive and fair, as well as driven from the bottom up (UNRISD 2012, UNEP 2011).

SSE is well-positioned to do this through two main avenues of innovation and change. The first involves a multi-purpose approach that balances economic, social and environmental objectives to ensure an ‘eco-social’ sustainable transition (UNRISD 2021). Numerous examples referred to above capture this approach (Cook et al. 2012, UNRISD 2019, UNRISD 2016). Box 7.1 includes other examples. Inclusiveness and fairness are positioned centrally in green economy transitions – they are not add-ons.

### Box 7.1 Social enterprise innovations

Examples from France, India, Tanzania and Zambia illustrate how SSEOs are expanding and diversifying their activities in the field of renewable energy and sustainable resource use.

- **France:** The geographical expansion of eco-friendly retail delivery and removal services using cargo bicycles has occurred as one worker cooperative, Toutenvélo, expanded into a national network of cooperatives (ICA 2021).
- **India:** The social enterprise, Global Himalayan Expedition (GHE), is electrifying remote villages in Ladakh, India, through solar microgrids. This, in turn, facilitates access to Innovation Centers, which have been established to allow students to access offline internet educational resources and material. GHE also generates income generating activities linked to homestays and sustainable tourism (GHE n.d.).
- **Tanzania:** The Buchosa housing cooperative in Tanzania supports members in acquiring low-cost housing in a way that prevents deforestation, utilising burnt brick technology, made using rice husks as fuel.
- **Zambia:** World Bicycle Relief, working through its social enterprise Buffalo Bicycles, has partnered with the government in Zambia to combat low school attendance rates of girls via the use of bicycles and supportive community-led programming (World Bicycle Relief, 2021).

Source: ILO. 2021b.

*The second avenue of change relates to structural or systemic aspects, including public policy frameworks and production and consumption patterns.* Key in this regard are multiple forms of contestation, advocacy and participation in policy and planning processes – issues addressed below in relation to SDGs 16 and 17 – that can address the limits of mainstream approaches to greening referred to above.

In relation to consumption patterns, SSE is concerned primarily with meeting essential needs, not catering to consumerism with its insatiable demand for non-essential products and novelty (Jackson 2009). This orientation of SSE overlaps with the definition of sustainable consumption proposed at the Oslo symposium on sustainable consumption in 1994 (UNEP, n.d.): “the use of services and related products, which respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life while minimizing the use of natural resources and toxic materials as well as the emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle of the service or product so as not to jeopardize the needs of future generations.”

There is a growing movement within SSE to transform consumerist lifestyles and reduce consumption. One aspect involves so-called “voluntary simplicity”, which entails not only limiting the range and quantities of products purchased but also promoting repair, reuse and recycling. Certain principles and practices associated with “frugal innovation” have similar aims (Radjou and Prabhu 2014, Line Carpentier 2021).

Transforming production patterns hinges to a considerable degree on renewable energy, sustainable resource management, eco-efficiency, waste reduction and recycling. The production methods adopted by SSEOs often centre on these aspects. This was noted above in relation to agro-ecological farming practices (SDG 2) and the work of waste picker cooperatives and associations involved in recycling (SDG 9) and is discussed in the section below dealing with sustainable forest and fisheries management (SDGs 14 and 15).

All these aspects have been identified as a potential expanding area for SSEOs, particularly in the context of the growing circular economy, which aims to produce goods and services while reducing the consumption and waste of raw materials and non-renewable energy, operating as a loop within a given territory (GECES 2016, Line Carpentier 2021). According to GECES (2016):

**“ The steps of eco-design, product reuse and repair, waste reuse and recycling that characterise this new form of economy all require technological and social innovations that are primarily supported by social enterprises. ”**

Such innovations also include ‘up-cycling’, shifting the focus from reuse to creating new products, a process traditionally ignored by profit-seeking enterprises. In Antwerp and Gent in Belgium and local areas in the Netherlands, social enterprises, for example, have transformed textile waste into new products (Boiten 2019, UNRISD 2019).

The circular economy approach is central to “The New European Consensus on Development”, the European Commission’s Social Business Initiative and Social Economy Action Plan (European Commission 2018, European Commission 2021b). The Switch Africa Green Programme is another initiative that has adopted a regional approach to the promotion of circular economy via projects in seven countries in areas involving biogas technology, E-waste management, organic agriculture, green manufacturing and eco-industrial parks (UNEP 2020).

## Renewable energy

Cooperatively-owned and community-based renewable energy generation is well established in countries such as Belgium, Denmark, Germany, the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada. SSE energy models assume multiple forms involving, for example, cooperatives, social enterprises, groups of “prosumers” (persons who simultaneously produce and consume energy), community land trusts, and various partnership arrangements involving municipal authorities and utilities (Hoicka and MacArthur 2018, Gorroño-Albizu, Sperling and Djørup 2019).

The size and type of SSEOs active in the renewables sector, as well as the nature of the partnerships involved, vary considerably. When wind energy took off in Denmark over two decades ago, the largest wind farm, Middlegrunden, had a joint municipal/cooperative ownership structure. In Costa Rica, the cooperative, Coopelesca partnered with the Consorcio Nacional de Empresas de Electrificación de Costa Rica R.L (CONELECTRICAS R.L.) to build the first cooperative solar park, one of the largest in the country, producing 5 megawatts with 19,000 solar panels. Coopelesca has 104,000 members and electrifies an area of 4,770 km<sup>2</sup> via renewable sources, which also include hydroelectric. In recent decades, Brazil’s oldest energy cooperative, Certel, with 73,000 member families and 700 employees in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, has diversified into hydroelectric and photovoltaic plants, and has plans to build a wind power plant (ICA 2021).

Among large entities, diversification is often part a strategy to spread risk associated with reduced output in one type of renewable energy due to seasonal factors (ICA 2021). Large entities may also be better positioned to adapt to deregulated policy environments, technological developments (for example, the increasing scale of wind turbines) and competitive pressures from the private sector that have affected cooperatives in Denmark and elsewhere (Gorroño-Albizu, Sperling and Djørup 2019).


***Small cooperative or social enterprises often emerge, diversify their activities and expand geographically in response to unmet energy needs at the local level*** (see box 7.1). SSE initiatives can also emerge in a context where community residents mobilize in opposition to public or private initiatives, and adapt the project in question to their needs and demands. This occurred, for example, in the case of Australia’s first community-owned wind farm, the Hepburn Community Wind Park Cooperative, which produces electricity for 2,100 homes. Similarly, in the Republic of Korea and Chile, community energy projects have emerged as an alternative to nuclear or hydroelectric schemes dominated by large players (Simcock, Willis and Capener 2016).

***NGOs and microcredit institutions have also expanded their activities in the renewable energy sector.*** Indeed, they were the main operational partners in the world’s largest off-grid electrification programme, the Solar Home Systems programme in Bangladesh. Over a 15-year period beginning in 2003, approximately 20 million people, an estimated 14 per cent of the country’s population, benefited from the installation of over four million systems. While this scheme has lost momentum in recent years, it proved invaluable for increasing access to affordable energy in rural areas prior to the scaling up of the national grid (Cabraal et al. 2021).

In some sectors such as biofuels, SSE can provide an alternative to large-scale corporate-led forms of production. In Brazil, for example, farmers' organizations and cooperatives have played an important role in crafting a new approach to biofuel production that safeguards small-farmer interests through a better balance of food and feedstock production, enhanced bargaining power, fair trade and other incentives (Bastos Lima 2012).

## Climate action


The outcome targets for SDG 13 point to the need for urgent climate action on multiple fronts: building resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters (13.1); integrating climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning (13.2); and improving education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning (13.3).



As noted in previous sections, **SSEOs are, by definition, organizations formed to cope with crisis and adversity and build resilience.** Many are immersed in cultural traditions and practices that protect common property resources and reduce adverse climate impacts. And some have long been engaged in educational and training processes that focus on the climate challenge, adaptive responses and resilience.

While environmental awareness is part of the DNA of many SSEOs, certain organizations that hitherto focused exclusively on economic and social objectives are integrating environmental concerns and climate action into their core mission. Within the cooperative movement, concern for climate-related issues has risen considerably in recent decades. The cooperative principle of 'Concern for Community', which made explicit the link between members' needs and sustainable development, was added to the list of core cooperative principles in 1995 (ICA 2021).

Beyond renewable energy, waste management and the circular economy, discussed above, cooperatives have diversified their activities. Agricultural cooperatives, for example, often undertake activities related to water management, sustainable tourism, production of quality regional foods and organic farming. In the Netherlands, a network of environmental agricultural cooperatives allow conservation agencies to enter into environmental management contracts with groups of land managers, allowing landscapes to be regulated and conserved at a much larger scale (ILO and ICA 2014). Similarly, mutual benefit associations that provide insurance services are increasingly diversifying their services to address climate action. In the Philippines, for example, the large mutual association, CLIMBS, with approximately 4,000 member cooperatives, has recently introduced innovations to address problems exacerbated by natural disasters and climate change. These include providing weather-index insurance and helping member cooperatives build stronger and more resilient communities through training on business continuity planning (ILO 2019).



**SSE's other key role related to climate action involves efforts to shape government policy via advocacy and policy dialogue related to multiple issue areas.** These may include the defence of people's livelihoods

(for example, to protect waste pickers against eviction) and the environment (for example, to counter deforestation, land clearance or contamination related to mining and pesticide use). Such action depends crucially on defending rights, for example, the land rights of indigenous peoples or on free, prior and informed consent, which takes on added importance in relation to carbon offsets. It also involves measures to build resilience to deal with extreme climate-related conditions.

Another objective of climate action is policy change that expands the scope for multi-purpose “eco-social” activities and principles that characterize SSEOs (UNRISD 2019). This includes regulations, incentives and other forms of institutional support that can incubate, expand and diversify the role of SSEOs in relation, for example, to agroecology, community forestry, sustainable fishing, fair trade, renewable energy and circular economy activities.

A third arena of action relates to efforts to change policies and institutions at the macro or systemic level that not only reinforce patterns of unsustainable development but also position SSE on an unlevel playing field. Activism and policy dialogue in this area involve advocacy that is critical, for example, of fiscal policy that heavily subsidizes agriculture and extractive industries; bilateral and multilateral trade agreements that promote long trade and transport circuits and global value chains dominated by multinational corporations; and land concentration.

Whether in the field of climate action or advocacy more generally, a major challenge confronting SSE is how to structure a movement for change that can intervene not only in relation to different sets of issues but also at multiple levels of governance (local, provincial/sub-national, national, regional and international). Important in this regard are networks and associations that connect SSEOs and related stakeholders horizontally and vertically. Vertical linkages via regional and national associations are key for influencing policy at state and federal levels, as in the case, for example, of the Brazilian Solidarity Economy Forum (FBES) and Landless Rural Workers Movement (see box 2.1); the Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) and ASSEFA in India (see Box 2.1); the Federation of Community Forestry Users Nepal (FECOFUN); and the Ecuadorian Movement of Social and Solidarity Economy (MESSE) and the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE).

International structures, including apex bodies and “networks of networks”, are also key. La Via Campesina, with 180 affiliated organizations representing small farmers, rural workers, forest dwellers, fisherfolk and others, positions macro-policy centrally in its advocacy agenda to promote food sovereignty, agroecology and a just transition (La Via Campesina 2021). The International Cooperative Alliance, which represents and supports cooperative organizations in 112 countries, is engaged in policy dialogue related to a circular economy and a just transition (ICA 2021). RIPESS (the Intercontinental Network for the Promotion of Social Solidarity Economy) undertakes advocacy related to climate justice and other issues at different levels, from local communities to international institutions (RIPESS, n.d.). Other networks such as the Global Social Economy Forum (GSEF) and the SSE International Forum are also active internationally, connecting SSE actors and policymakers.





# 8. LIFE ABOVE GROUND AND BELOW WATER (SDGs 14 AND 15)



## SDG 14

*Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development*



## SDG 15

*Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss*

## Embedded social and natural systems

*Various SSE activities and forms of organization illustrate a key insight of a growing body of research, namely that natural systems do not simply impose limits on economic and social life that must be managed, but that social and natural systems are embedded in each other.* They are fundamentally inseparable, as is biodiversity and cultural diversity (Ryers et al. 2018). Such a perspective creates new possibilities for the achieving just transitions. It focuses not only on the instrumental value of nature for sustaining economic activities and well-being, or its intrinsic value in belief systems, but also on values associated with interpersonal and stakeholder relationships (UNDP 2020). As noted in section 1, SSE is fundamentally about such relations – ones involving mutual aid, solidarity, reciprocity, sharing knowledge, social regulation of the commons, networking, collective organizing, democratic governance and participatory decision-making or policymaking.



This embeddedness of livelihood strategies and biodiversity protection and their positive linkages have long been recognized in the case of indigenous populations. An estimated 36 per cent of intact forest landscapes worldwide are within indigenous people's lands, according to UNDP (2020), which has observed that:

**“ Indigenous and local knowledge is a key link for building synergies between the wellbeing of local people and the conservation of ecosystems. To realize this potential for sustainable human development, indigenous and local knowledge needs to be embedded in and actively connected to ecosystem governance that recognizes their rights. ”**

Further, these linkages are explained not simply by greater environmental awareness but by a combination of factors related to values, local knowledge, worldviews, social relations and governance arrangements that make up a social system inherently more aligned the goal of protecting and regenerating nature. Such linkages also characterize other areas of SSE. They are increasingly documented in relation to smallholder agriculture, as noted in section 2 that discussed the spread of agroecology practices. They are also relevant in contexts of agrarian frontier expansion. A study of the savanna ecoregion, the Cerrado, in the Brazilian state of Mato Grosso, for example, reveals markedly different rates of deforestation linked to the expansion of large-scale soybean versus small-scale farming, and the fact that the latter is better integrated ecologically in natural landscapes.

The role of SSE in harnessing the potentially positive connections between social and natural systems is becoming more apparent as attention turns to agroecology, agroforestry, sustainable fishing, sustainable tourism and community forestry (see box 8.1). It is also apparent as the limits of green economy approaches centred on corporate sustainability and the commodification of nature become clearer.



**Box  
8.1**
**Defending livelihoods and the environment**

The following examples illustrate the wide range of practices and innovations adopted by SSEOs which foster the sustainable use and management of forest, coastal, aquatic or marine environments. They involve mangrove conservation, reforestation, sustainable fishing and means for accessing markets for environmental goods and services.

**Mangrove conservation:** The Cananéia Oyster Producers' Cooperative in Mandira on the southern coast of Brazil, established new rules and practices to reconcile oyster harvesting with the conservation of local mangrove forests and their high biodiversity (COPAC 2019). Cooperative members are allowed three harvests a year, receive twice as much for their oysters as they received from market intermediaries, and benefit from higher sanitation and health standards.

**Sustainable fishing:** In Kenya, the Dunga Fishermen Cooperative Society is addressing the low stock levels resulting from overexploitation and climate change impacts, through breeding thousands of fish through an aquaculture development initiative and then releasing them into Lake Victoria. The cooperative is also actively discouraging fishers from using trawling nets and other gear that can deplete fish stocks.

**Accessing the certified timber market:** In a context where the growing demand for teak can negatively impact the environment and limit teak farmers' income due to their weak bargaining power to determine prices, a group of farmers from 46 villages in Southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia, partnered with Jaringan untuk Hutan (JAUH), a local NGO, and the Tropical Forest Trust (TFT) to form the Koperasi Hutan Jaya Lestari (KHJL) cooperative (USAID 2019). In 2005, the cooperative received Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification. The initial success of this initiative saw membership and planted area increase rapidly to 744 members and 750 hectares. Members also gained the right to manage 4,640 hectares of State teak plantation area. Questions remain, however, about the long-term sustainability of this cooperative given private sector competition and limited external support (Pidani and Kanowski 2011).

**Establishing tree plantations:** The Tree Growers' Cooperative Society (TGCS) programme in India uses the cooperative model to establish tree plantations on village common land with the active involvement of the local community (COPAC 2018). The TGCS members are provided long-term leases for these plantations. In 2007, there were 548 tree growers' cooperatives. In the Ajmer district of Rajasthan, India, community members consider the cooperatives important not only economically but also for preserving village common land that serves as a refuge for local flora and fauna.

*Note: Sources cited in the box text are located in the References at the end of this paper.*



## Community forestry

*In contexts of rapid deforestation, land conflicts and recognition of indigenous rights, governments around the world have increasingly turned their attention to different forms of community forestry.* These can range from growing trees on relatively small plots to managing forests designated as State-owned or governed under customary tenure regimes. Community forestry regimes are estimated to encompass nearly one third of the world's forest resources (Gilmore 2016).

In India and Nepal, for example, community forest groups manage a large proportion of national forests. By the early 2000s, India had approximately 84,000 joint forest management groups involving 8.4 million households and 22.5 per cent of forest land. By 2018, Nepal had approximately 22,000 community forest user groups comprising 2.9 million households (nearly half of total households) and 2.2 million hectares, 34 per cent of forest land (Thani et al. 2019; Kutter and Mitchell 2021).

In both countries, community forestry has provided an avenue for tackling issues related to women's well-being and empowerment, discussed earlier in relation to SDG 5. Women make up the core of the membership of community forestry initiatives. They are also assuming leadership roles in local forest

protection structures in India and in apex organizations such as FECOFUN, the Federation of Community Forestry Users Nepal (Agarwal 2015).

Much remains to be done, however, to realize the full potential of community forestry. Gilmour (2016) notes the following key challenges:

- limited participation of the poorest members of communities;
- benefits are often captured by local elites;
- communities are often assigned user rights in highly degraded forests, of limited value to communities;
- restricted access to commercially valuable timber resources;
- communities are urged by government agencies to protect rather than manage forest resources;
- real decision-making power tends to be maintained by forest authorities rather than devolved to communities.

Furthermore, local systems that can use and manage resources sustainably are under threat from myriad forces including land grabs, out-migration and lack of government support. The future of community forestry and forest protection hinges crucially on land rights and the role of governments in securing such rights (Gilmour 2016).

Policy and institutional reform and innovation play a key role in addressing these challenges. In India and Nepal, joint forest management schemes have evolved through trial and error to provide a promising governance framework. In Côte d'Ivoire, attempts to arrest deforestation and climate change have seen a cooperative union made up of 42 cooperatives across the entire cocoa and coffee production zone sign agreements with the Forestry Development Agency (Société de Développement des Forêts, SODEFOR), to allow for the conversion of perennial crops into a classified forest. This has enabled the cooperative members to operate community forests under the supervision of forest technicians (COPAC 2018). In Romania, traditional forms of commons ("obște", "composesorat") have been re-instituted as associations which collectively manage significant forest areas and other natural resources, as well as produce new goods and services of interest to the community (Vameșu 2018).

## Land and user rights

Government efforts to protect forests and promote community forestry often begin with policies, laws and regulations that reassert the customary land rights of indigenous peoples and communities. Their application, however, may be ineffective due to resource constraints, administrative hurdles and entrenched interests. In Honduras, the area under community-based forestry regimes grew by 56 percent from 2008 to 2015. ***Despite significant recognition of the importance of community forestry within policy and law, concrete support has been limited in areas related to social, institutional and financial capital, while information is lacking with regard to improvements in natural capital.*** Additionally, rights to forest resources are sometimes undermined by mega-projects such as mining and hydroelectric dams (FAO 2019).



In Indonesia, some federal-level institutions have responded positively to advocacy related to indigenous land rights in customary forests and social forestry by large associations such as the Indigenous Peoples Alliance of the Archipelago (AMAN) and the Indonesian Forum for the Environment, WALHI. The implementation of policies and regulations, however, has been undermined by complex administrative requirements related to documentation, coupled with local opposition and ongoing provision of concessions to palm oil, logging and mining corporations. Furthermore, legislation does not support the process of free, prior and informed consent for indigenous and traditional communities in relation to the protection of their land, forests and natural resources (FoE APac 2019).

***The issue of access rights for small-scale fishing communities and cooperatives is a key determinant of whether they can realize their potential in terms of social and environmental benefits.*** Preferential access related to customary tenure is an established international norm. As FAO (2015) notes:

**“** *Local norms and practices, as well as customary or otherwise preferential access to fishery resources and land by small-scale fishing communities including indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities, should be recognized, respected and protected in ways that are consistent with international human rights law.* **”**



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This issue has taken on added importance in contexts where many governments are allocating user rights to private enterprises operating on a far larger scale, sometimes on the basis of unsubstantiated assumptions regarding efficiency and compliance criteria. Largely ignored are issues related to equity (Pinkerton 2015). Among the key elements underpinning the success of fishing cooperatives in Mexico are secure territorial user rights and, related to this, the ability to collaborate with other organizations to influence public policy (FAO 2008, Huff et al. 2019, Aburto-Oropeza et al. 2018). Evidence from Chile, where territorial user rights have been granted to artisanal fishers that organize collectively, points to important environmental and social gains, including for women, who were traditionally excluded from many fishing cooperatives (Gallardo- Fernández and Saunders 2018).



# 9. INCLUSIVE AND DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS (SDGs 16 AND 17)



## **SDG 16**

***Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels***



## **SDG 17**

***Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development***

SDGs 16 addresses issues related to peace, social cohesion, non-discrimination, participation and other institutional norms that resonate with the ethical and governance dimensions of SSE. SDG 17 deals with key means for implementing the SDGs, including financing, capacity building, technology and trade – issues that have been touched upon in previous sections of this paper. It also deals with aspects of governance related to policy and institutional coherence, multi-stakeholder partnerships, data, monitoring and accountability. These aspects, along with the issue of participation, are the main focus of this section.

A major development during the past two decades has been the emergence of a group of countries where institutional and public policy reforms have positioned SSE more centrally as a means of implementing the 2030 Agenda. These initiatives are directly linked to achieving outcome targets related to developing effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels (16.6); ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels (16.7); enhancing policy coherence for sustainable development (17.14), multi-stakeholder partnerships (17.16), as well as mobilizing additional resources for financing (17.3), capacity building (17.9) and improved development indicators and measurement (17.19).



## Democratic governance

**Core SSE values and practices directly related to democratic governance manifest themselves at different levels:** at the micro and meso levels of groups, organizations, enterprises and communities that adopt democratic and participatory means of deliberation and decision-making; and at the macro level of public administration and opinion, where various aspects of active citizenship aim to influence the policy process and public discourse.

The scope and quality of democratic governance depends crucially on the autonomy of SSEOs, stakeholder engagement, managerial structures, participatory mechanisms in the policy process, and the broader context of civil and political rights. Both positive and negative trends are apparent worldwide. As mentioned in sections 1 and 5, mainstreaming and institutionalizing SSE can give rise to challenges related to autonomy, mission drift and democratic governance (Coraggio 2016, Muñoz and Zamora 2021, ILO 2022c, Borzaga and Sacchetti 2021, Fraisse et al. 2016). Furthermore, effective participation within the policy process may be constrained by entrenched bureaucratic processes and a culture of top-down decision-making. Policy discourse acknowledging the need for participation is frequently not matched by meaningful roles, functions and spaces that enable SSEOs to engage in agenda-setting, negotiation, standard-setting and monitoring (Yiu, Saner and Bardy 2020).

**A shrinking democratic and civil space can impact SSE at both the level of operational activities and participation in the policy process.** The Swedish development cooperation organization, We Effect, notes the extent to which restrictive laws and regulations have limited or controlled the work of partner organizations working with cooperatives to promote the right to housing. In nearly half of the approximately 20 countries where the organization operates, such constraints were encountered (We Effect 2021). They included targeting human rights defenders with threats, arbitrary detention, prosecution and stigmatization; stricter registration and reporting requirements and monitoring of operational activities; restrictions on internet use for civil society; and restricted public financing for activities. Controls associated with the COVID-19 pandemic have further constricted freedom of association and assembly, according to We Effect (2021):

“ *The COVID-19 pandemic has had a severe negative impact on democratic ambitions in many countries. This is a huge disappointment coming so close after the successful Agenda 2030 agreement, where togetherness felt real, with partnership not only between governments, but also with commitments from the private sector, trade unions and civil society.* ”



Despite numerous challenges, SSEOs are crucial conduits for democratic governance given the scope for participatory decision-making within organizations, participation in the policy process at different levels of governance (municipal, state and federal, and supranational), and the ongoing vibrancy of old and new social movements and advocacy networks.

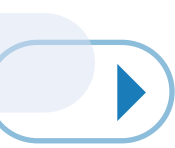
Concerning democratic governance within SSEOs, there is growing awareness of the importance of autonomy. In an attempt to overcome the subordination of cooperatives to political interests and state control, which was prevalent in numerous developing countries in previous decades, the international cooperative movement has attempted to reassert the importance of autonomy as a core cooperative principle (ICA 2015). This, in turn, has been articulated in international law via ILO Recommendation 193 of 2002, which has guided legislative reform in many countries (ILO 2002). The issue of autonomy has also resurfaced in contexts where SSEOs are being integrated as service providers in national welfare systems. While the principle of autonomy does certainly not preclude public-SSE partnerships, it calls attention to the need to ensure that democratic decision-making and SSE values are not compromised in the process of forging closer relations with institutions in other sectors.

Also important for democratic governance has been the emergence of new types of SSEOs that have diversified their stakeholder base and widened the scope for participation (Borzaga and Sacchetti (2021).

***Various social enterprises, including social cooperatives, founded on the basis of bottom-up initiatives of citizens, have emerged to serve the general interest of providing services to those in need.*** Here the primary stakeholders are not only, or not necessarily, members but workers, volunteers and users. The notion of democratic governance extends beyond “one member, one vote” to multi-stakeholder deliberation and decision-making, which may also include civil society, public and private sector organizations and institutions with which they engage. The deliberative process involved is key for identifying and satisfying unmet needs, creating bonds within the organizations and democratizing the organization and the economy more generally. From the perspective of democracy, these experiences are important not only because of participatory governance at the level of organizations but also because such practices are often reproduced within SSE networks and community relations, as well as in the arena of public policy. In several European countries, such as Belgium, Italy and France, these governance arrangements have the backing of law (Borzaga and Sacchetti 2021).

As the experience of numerous municipalities, cities, regions and countries illustrates, ***an important means to enhance the effectiveness of government actions aimed at supporting SSE is to strengthen mechanisms for the co-construction of policy, where organizations representing the workers, producers and citizens involved in the SSE, can shape the design, implementation, monitoring and review of policy, planning and legislative processes*** (Mendell and Alain 2015, Bance, Bouchard and Greiling 2022).





An increasing number of countries have institutionalized spaces and processes for the co-construction of policy. **More than 20 countries have now adopted parliamentary laws or presidential decrees explicitly mandating state support for SSE as a broad sector.** This is in addition to laws related to specific types of SSEOs, for example, cooperatives (ILO 2022b; Utting 2022; Poirier, Wautiez and Alain 2018; Socioeco.org, n.d.a.).<sup>2</sup> Multi-stakeholder forums or other participatory mechanisms are generally important components of such laws. They may involve formal structures, such as the Consultative Council for SSE in Uruguay, or institutionalized informal interactions as in Quebec, Canada and the Republic of Korea, where large SSE umbrella organizations are recognized as key interlocutors (Mendell, Neamtan and Yi 2020, KoSEA 2019). In several countries and jurisdictions, co-construction has played an important role in overcoming the limitations of top-down policy design and implementation, and ensuring that policymaking, evaluation and review are aligned with the diversity, needs and preferences of SSE actors. Important in this regard are decentralized consultative structures at the territorial level – the case of Brazil, for example. In Costa Rica, multi-stakeholder working groups are organized on a sectoral or thematic basis (Morais and Bacic 2020, MTSS 2021).

The recent experience of policymaking related to SSE in certain regions and countries provides important pointers related to the broader challenge of building effective institutions called for in SDG target 16.6. Efforts to promote SSE have often centred on ad hoc initiatives related to training or access to finance and markets (Chaves-Avila and Gallego-Bono 2020). Increasingly, both municipal and national governments are recognizing the importance of a broader, more integrated, “ecosystemic” approach. This involves:

- mobilizing support from multiple, often inter-connected, public sector, private sector and civil society actors and institutions, as well as regulating their behaviour where it impedes SSE formation and development (Borzaga et al. 2020, Chaves-Avila and Gallego-Bono 2020, Jenkins et al. 2021, Mendell, Neamtan and Yi 2020).
- actions to strengthen multiple forms of capital – financial, human, social, knowledge, manufacturing, physical, among others (Sahasranamam et al. 2021, Sahasranamam et al. 2020).
- “multiscalar governance”, where resources are mobilized and policy is designed and implemented at multiple levels – municipal, provincial/state, federal/national and supra-national or international levels.

Studies examining variations in social enterprise performance in different countries point to the quality of the institutional ecosystem as a key determinant of stronger performance (Sahasranamam and Ball 2017). As a result of this change in approach, there have been notable gains in relation to means of implementation identified under SDG 17 involving finance, capacity building and partnerships.

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<sup>2</sup> Texts of adopted policies and legislation are featured in [NATLEX](#), the ILO’s database of national labour, social security and related human rights legislation.

This approach is being promoted, for example, by inter-governmental organizations such as the OECD. It is also a feature of the recently launched European Commission Social Economy Action Plan, which has three core components: to create enabling policy and legal frameworks related, for example, to taxation, public procurement and State aid; business enterprise development support for start-ups and other SSEOs, including new financial instruments and training to reskill and upskill their workers; and communication activities and training courses for public officials to make SSE practices and potential more visible, nationally and regionally (European Commission 2021a). It is also emphasized in public policy promoting SSE in the Republic of Korea and Spain, and has long been a feature of the enabling environment in regions of countries, such as Wallonia, Belgium, Quebec, Canada, and Emilia Romagna, Italy where SSE has a strong presence (KoSEA 2019, FAECTA 2021).

## The data challenge

As recognition of the role of SSE in inclusive and sustainable development grows, some governments have focused their attention on raising the visibility of SSE and assessing its impact through timely, reliable and disaggregated data (target 17.18). **Statistical measurement is important for the legitimacy of SSE within public policy.** It runs the risk, however, of focusing on a narrow set of easily identifiable organizations and not capturing adequately the diversity and distinctiveness of SSE (Bouchard and Salathé-Beaulieu 2021).

Until recently, statistical data related to SSE has tended to focus primarily on non-profit organizations and diverse forms of cooperatives, including mutual societies. Recent and ongoing work related to cooperatives has aimed to harmonize, standardize, update, fill gaps in data and indicators and make them comparable internationally. Particular attention has focused on the number and type of cooperatives, the members of cooperatives, the work generated in cooperatives and the economic contribution of cooperatives. Labour statisticians themselves (ILO 2018c) concluded that:

“ *Such statistics would enable an accurate assessment of the contribution cooperatives make to economies, including labour markets, and would support the formulation of effective policies at times of profound changes in the world of work.* ”

This work on cooperatives statistics can be extended to the broader arena of SSE (ILO, n.d.) It is also vital to develop a common understanding of social impact measurement by clarifying and streamlining measurement concepts and practices (OECD 2021b). This is a core component of the European Commission Social Economy Action Plan launched in December 2021 (European Commission 2021b). At a minimum, quantifying SSE requires measuring emerging sectors such as social and impact-driven enterprises, an approach pioneered in Portugal, for example, which aims to encompass multiple forms of SSEOs and social business within “satellite accounts” (CASES 2020). It could also involve measurement



related to digital mission-driven organizations that operate across national boundaries (Bouchard and Salathé-Beaulieu 2021).

It is important to foster multifaceted impact measurement. This would allow policymakers and other stakeholders to better comprehend the broader socio-economic value of SSEOs beyond employment and to identify where opportunities and challenges lie. Improved data availability around SSE would also significantly help policymakers develop new frameworks and incentive schemes – or reshape existing ones – to better suit the varying needs of different SSEOs.

Quantifying the broader arena of SSE, however, is extremely challenging given varying understandings of the SSE universe, the different types of SSEOs that may exist in different countries and the weight of informal economy organizations and practices within the SSE. For these reasons, complementary tools such as statistical surveys, which can capture territorial variations, and other methodologies to map the SSE landscape, can play a useful role in capturing the scale and scope of SSE (Jenkins et al. 2021).

## Policy coherence

Whether policy support for SSE is effective depends crucially on policy coherence (17.14), that is, the extent to which different government policies and public institutions are working in a coordinated, complementary and synergistic manner, rather than involving ad hoc or contradictory interventions (UNRISD 2016). It also depends on whether policy discourse supporting cooperatives, social enterprises and other SSEOs, as well as social protection and social innovation, is actually reflected in resource allocation and policy implementation.

***There are numerous challenges in developing an enabling institutional environment for SSE.*** Stakeholders may lack of clear understanding of the concept itself. There may be mistrust of certain SSE legal forms, such as cooperatives, given their checkered history in some countries related, for example, to instances of mismanagement and political interference that undermined their autonomy. Emerging forms of social enterprises may lack of legal recognition. More generally, weak business development services and limited access to financing can constrain SSE development.

***Policy coherence is not simply about more or better coordination of incentives and regulations related to finance, training, market access, knowledge transfer, legal frameworks, partnerships and data collection. Also key are aspects related to civil, political and cultural rights; land rights for landless farmers, women and indigenous peoples; universal social protection; public investment in physical and social infrastructure; and macro-economic and fiscal policies.*** They fundamentally determine the prospects or possibilities for empowerment of disadvantaged groups, and whether SSE can operate and expand on a level playing field (Utting 2022).

In numerous countries, the development of SSE has occurred in contexts of economic reform that can be contradictory from the perspective of SSE. Decentralization and targeted poverty reduction programmes, for example, may encourage particular forms of SSEOs in particular sectors, but privatization and austerity policies often constrain universal social protection and public investment. Similarly, economic reform has often included policies more attuned to the preferences of profit-oriented business rather than SSEOs, for example, de-regulation related to financial services and labour rights; fiscal policies favouring corporations and the wealthy; prioritizing commercial firms within public procurement; and investment centred on extractive industries and agribusiness that can have harmful environmental and social impacts.

***The issue of policy coherence also connects with that of democracy.*** Policy incoherence is particularly apparent in contexts where autocracy suppresses civil, political and cultural rights. But it can also be an issue in contexts where support for SSE is associated with a particular political party or leader, and where electoral competition ushers in a new administration (Utting 2017, Verschuur and Calvão et al. 2018). In recent years, political developments in Brazil and Ecuador, for example, have weakened certain institutions that previously enabled SSE (Morais and Bacic 2020, Guerra and Reyes Labega 2020, Carranza Barona 2019). For this reason efforts to garner multiparty support for SSE and to institutionalize State support are key. Framework laws for SSE and the creation of ministries or ministerial departments with direct responsibility for SSE have been important mechanisms in this regard (Poirier, Wautiez and Alain 2018, Utting 2017). When political changes at the national level constrain the institutional environment for SSE, state or provincial governments at the sub-national level and local governments can continue to play a key role in enabling SSE (Jenkins et al. 2021, Pereira, Morais and Souza Santos 2020). International networks such as the Global Social Economy Forum (GSEF), comprising municipal authorities and civil society networks, are important for promoting local government engagement and transferring knowledge related to good practices at the municipal level (GSEF, n.d.).

Ultimately, whether SSE is prioritized, and whether the spirit and letter of laws and policies related to SSE are applied in practice, will depend in large part on the quality of democratic governance. Policy coherence fundamentally depends on the ability of SSE practitioners, intermediary organizations and other stakeholders to organize, deliberate, engage in advocacy and participate effectively in the policy process. And where these actions are effective locally, nationally, regionally and internationally, there is a real possibility that the emerging global movement for SSE can become a significant player in bringing about the paradigm shift called for in the 2030 Agenda.





# 10. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNMENTS AND POLICYMAKERS: FORGING AN ENABLING POLICY ENVIRONMENT

The preceding sections have showcased *the contribution of SSEs and networks around the world to achieving multiple targets related to all 17 SDGs* and the extent to which they are mobilizing resources and innovating to address pressing sustainable development problems. But they cannot do it alone; governments, too, need to step up to the plate.

A primary task of the UN Task Force on SSE (UNTFSSSE) is to raise the visibility of SSE and its potential within policy circles and share knowledge on what policymakers can do to support SSE in achieving the SDGs. While policy and institutional frameworks must be adapted to national circumstances, the following recommendations are proposed by the Task Force.

## What can and should governments be doing?

*Governments need to recognize more centrally the role of SSE in a development agenda that is fit for purpose.* It is imperative to rethink the means of implementation for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by paying far greater attention to SSE. Indeed, midway through the 2030 deadline to achieve the SDGs, and with several of the SDGs significantly off-track, it is not too early to consider a post-2030 development agenda that systematically factors in SSE in ways that are conducive to different cultural and country contexts.

Governments should adopt a strategic vision that acknowledges the full potential of SSE in achieving sustainable development and just transition. SSE should not be perceived solely as a tool for poverty reduction, welfare provision and work integration. SSE can help governments address major contemporary policy challenges and development problems, including humanitarian needs related to crises such as COVID-19 and forced displacement; extending social protection to underserved populations; promoting decent work; food security; gender and wealth inequality; the climate emergency; and the diffusion of democratic values and participatory practices.



**Governments need to play a more constructive role in fostering an institutional environment conducive to SSE.**

The 2030 Agenda for Development specifies a number of general principles that are key for enabling inclusive and sustainable development. They include domestic resource mobilization, policy and institutional coherence, partnerships, participatory decision-making and “leaving no one behind”. It is now possible to translate these principles into specific guidance related to SSE thanks to policy lessons emanating from countries and governments that have pioneered institutional reforms and policy innovations.

**Governments should adopt a wide policy lens when supporting SSE.**

It is important to recognize that SSE is immersed in a broad institutional ecosystem and that action is required on multiple policy fronts. These include:

- financing, tax incentives and subsidies;
- technical and professional training, as well as learning about SSE values and practices within the formal education system;
- facilitating fair access to markets via infrastructure;
- public procurement;
- regulatory reform to facilitate the expansion of SSE;
- extending social protection coverage and labour rights to SSEOs and related populations;
- systematizing data and institutionalizing and adopting innovative approaches for impact assessment;
- generating and sharing knowledge on SSE;
- fostering public–SSE or multi-stakeholder partnerships; and
- facilitating advocacy and networking and the co-construction of policy.

A broad-based policy approach that supports SSE can address multiple risks associated with top-down policy making and mission drift, as well as financial incentives that may stimulate the growth of certain types of SSEOs in the absence of other assets and capabilities that they require to be economically sustainable.

**Governments should also look beyond policy instruments directly targeting SSE and promote policy coherence.**

Beyond improving policy coordination, governments can ensure that policies aimed at promoting SSE are not undermined by weak implementation or other policies that skew the distribution of resources and incentives in favour of other sectors and institutions. A two-pronged approach is important to promote policy coherence:

- i) Policy statements and design that support SSE should be matched by a corresponding commitment in relation to budget allocations, the regulatory environment and policy implementation at national, sub-national and local levels. Governments should ensure that policy discourse promoting SSE is supported by actual resource distribution and regulatory support.



- ii) Fiscal, investment, industrial, competition and trade policies, as well as property rights can impact SSE, negatively or positively, as much as direct forms of support. Policies in these areas are key for determining the scope for domestic resource mobilization via the public sector and whether SSE can operate on a level playing field with profit-centred business. It is important for governments to assess whether or not such policies are synergistic in terms of enabling the contribution of SSE to sustainable development.

**Governments can lock in support for SSE.** Too often government support for SSE is transitory or fluctuates considerably. It needs to be institutionalized via framework laws, as in Cameroon, France and Uruguay; the creation of ministries, as in Luxembourg, Nicaragua and Senegal, or other State entities with direct responsibility for SSE; medium-term SSE development plans and strategies, as in Costa Rica and Morocco; and bipartisan or multiparty support, as in Italy, the Republic of Korea and Tunisia.

**Governments should create and institutionalize spaces for the co-construction of policy.** Both policy coherence and locking in State support depend crucially on whether effective spaces exist for social dialogue and whether SSE actors are able to co-design and co-implement policy. The experiences of numerous countries and territories sharply illustrate the limits of top-down interventions and the advantages of co-constructed policies: they are better adapted to local needs, foster partnerships and mobilize support from multiple sources and sectors. They also facilitate implementation by creating a greater sense of local ownership. Previous sections in this paper have identified governments that have promoted this approach, whether nationally in Costa Rica and the Republic of Korea; regionally in Emilia Romagna (Italy) and Quebec (Canada); or at the level of local governments, as in Belo Horizonte (Brazil), Kerala (India), Seoul (Republic of Korea) and numerous territories in France. Co-construction of policy also needs to occur at multiple levels of governance – for example, in federal, provincial and municipal jurisdictions – to ensure that the system of public administration as a whole is working in a coordinated, responsive and synergistic manner or that at least one level of governance can be proactive if another falters.

**Local governments can play a more constructive role in supporting SSE.** Municipal and other forms of local government have a key role to play in enabling SSE. Beyond providing essential social and physical infrastructure, they can connect SSEOs with state institutions and programmes, make them eligible for procurement bids, develop partnership initiatives, generate and diffuse knowledge, and inform policymaking at other levels. It is incumbent on local governments to promote participatory decision-making to ensure responsive policy design, effective policy implementation and that resource allocation is fair and equitable.

## Taking action at the international level

Inter-governmental organizations and international financial institutions must do more to enable SSE. An increasing volume of reports, conferences and multi-stakeholder dialogues indicate that inter-governmental organizations are focusing more attention on SSE. The UNTFSSSE, for example, has adopted a three-year action plan comprising initiatives to support the work of inter-governmental bodies and international networks, to create and share knowledge on SSE and the SDGs, and to develop strategic interventions (see box 10.1). National, regional and multilateral development banks should recognize SSE and financial instruments developed to support SSEOs.

### Box 10.1

### UNTFSSSE Action Plan 2022–2024

#### **Mainstreaming and enhancing the SSE international dimension and profile**

- Support the process of adopting a UN General Assembly Resolution on SSE
- Support the ILC General Discussion on SSE and Decent Work at ILO
- Support the adoption of OECD guiding principles
- Identify, participate and engage in key international alliances and events
- Strengthen synergies and engage with countries and local governments

#### **Boosting the creation and sharing of knowledge on SSE and SDGs**

- Continue the work on the SSE Knowledge Hub for the SDGs in terms of production of knowledge and repository
- Publish a new UNTFSSSE position paper
- Strengthen the accessibility of knowledge and launch a UNTFSSSE awareness raising package on the SSE
- Strengthen the communication and outreach of the UNTFSSSE
- Keep organizing the UNTFSSSE conferences

#### **Developing strategic areas of interventions on SSE**

- Develop a fund-raising strategy for the global, regional and national programs
- Strengthen the regional dimension of the UNTFSSSE
- Explore access to finance and social investment for SSE actors
- Establish an interactive engagement with youth organizations on the promotion of the SSE
- Explore formal monitoring, reporting or rating of countries on SSE

Note: Sources cited in the box text are located in the References at the end of this paper. Source: [UNTFSSSE, 2022. UNTFSSSE Third Technical Symposium Brief Report and Action Plan 2022–2024](#).

Despite recent initiatives – for example, the resolution and recommendation adopted by the ILO and OECD, respectively, in 2022 (see box 10.2) – the task of institutionalizing SSE within the multilateral system and internationally remains incipient. Beyond knowledge building, advocacy and policy dialogue, it requires an institutional infrastructure of organizations and networks, strategic plans and programmes, and a set of established standards that provide guidance and mandates for governments, what is known as international soft law.

Selected examples of initiatives involving institution building, new consortia and networks, norm setting, advocacy and action plans and strategies that have been adopted during the past 10 years to enable SSE at the regional and international levels are identified in box 10.2. These examples are important pointers as to what can be done to institutionalize SSE globally. Governments can strengthen dialogue and collaboration with UNTFSSSE, ILO, OECD, GSEF and other international and regional organizations and networks supporting SSE. This will raise the visibility of SSE and its potential worldwide and strengthen knowledge sharing, policy guidance and development assistance.

Like the African Union and European Union, regional bodies can formulate SSE action plans to be implemented by member States. The United Nations and other intergovernmental bodies can follow the lead of the ILO, FAO and OECD in adopting recommendations and normative guidelines that mandate these organizations to expand their work on SSE, provide policy guidelines for Member States and have the status of international soft law. International financial institutions, including development banks, can expand programmes to invest and build capacity in social enterprises and social protection. International, regional and sectoral organizations can look to the examples of the UNTFSSSE, the International Coalition of the SSE and the Pact for Impact Global Alliance to build stronger coalitions and networks.

And just as some regional bodies are calling on their member States to promote SSE, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) could call on governments worldwide to support SSE within their laws, policies, programmes and action plans. In this regard, the UNTFSSSE recommends that the UNGA adopt a resolution on SSE requesting the Secretary-General to direct UN agencies to formulate a Plan of Action on SSE in support of SDGs and to report periodically on progress made.

## Box 10.2 A ten-year timeline of selected international initiatives (2013–22)

- 2013** United Nations Inter-agency Task Force on SSE is established.
- 2014** Global Social Economy Forum (GSEF) is formally established.
- 2015** The Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication are launched by the UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO).  
ILO Recommendation 204 on Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy is approved.  
G20 Inclusive Business Framework is adopted.
- 2018** MERCOSUR Recommendation CMC 02/18 to support “Promotion of cooperativism and associativism in family agricultura in Mercosur” (*Fomento del cooperativismo y del asociativismo en la agricultura familiar en el Mercosur*) is adopted.  
The Expert Group on Social Economy and Social Enterprises (GECES) is established by the European Commission.
- 2019** ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work mandates the ILO to support the SSE.  
Ten Elements of Agroecology are agreed by the FAO Council.  
The Pact for Impact Global Alliance is formed by representatives of six governments, networks such as RIPESS, the Euclid Network and other organizations to leverage the role of SSE globally in achieving the SDGs.
- 2021** International Coalition of the Social Solidarity Economy is founded by the ICA, GSEF, SSE International Forum (SSEIF), the Association Internationale de la Mutualite (AIM) and the International Cooperative and Mutual Insurance Federation (ICMIF).  
Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) endorses Guidelines for the Promotion of Inclusive Business in ASEAN.  
European Union Social Economy Action Plan is approved.
- 2022** International Labour Conference of the ILO adopted the Resolution and Conclusions concerning the decent work and the social and solidarity economy.  
Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Recommendation on Social Economy and Social Innovation is adopted.  
African Union’s Ten-year Continental SSE Strategy and Implementation Plan (2023–33) is drafted.

**Governments can take full advantage of the development road map provided by SSE.** For too long, policy frameworks have been guided by particular perspectives on market- or state-led development and public-private partnerships that sideline other forms of economy and SSE. Meanwhile, the international development community has long accepted the idea that development needs to be far more people and planet-centred. This has often remained, however, a vague policy objective or one reliant on fragmented policy initiatives that do little to tackle the root causes of vulnerability and injustice. SSE places labour, basic needs, livelihood security, equity and empowerment front and centre in the development agenda. It provides a road map that signposts specific types of organizations and principles, as well as development objectives and priorities. Fit for purpose, governments and inter-governmental organizations can use this road map to full advantage.





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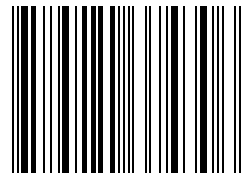
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