



Guidelines for Local Governments on Policies for Social and Solidarity Economy



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The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) is an autonomous research institute within the UN system that undertakes interdisciplinary research and policy analysis on the social dimensions of contemporary development issues. Through our work we aim to ensure that social equity, inclusion and justice are central to development thinking, policy and practice.

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The Global Social Economy Forum is a global social and solidarity economy (SSE) network that aims to serve as a hub for sharing visions and experiences through cross-border collaboration and cooperation based on multilateral (public-private-community) partnerships for an inclusive, equitable and human centred world for all of us.

This report is a product of the UNRISD project *Promoting SSE through Public Policies: Guidelines for Local Governments*, led by Ilcheong Yi as research coordinator. Research and writing by Hamish Jenkins (lead author), Ilcheong Yi, Samuel Bruelisauer and Kameni Chaddha. Produced by the UNRISD Communications and Outreach Unit. Graphic design concept by Sergio Sandoval.

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ISBN 978-92-9085-120-2

January 2021

Acknowledgements

UNRISD wishes to thank everybody who provided useful feedback on drafts of this publication. These include the peer reviewers: Andrea Agostinucci at UNDP ART, Antonella Noya and her team at the OECD's Unit on Social Economy, as well as Laurence Kwark and the GSEF Secretariat. In addition, UNRISD is grateful for the valuable feedback received on specific sections of the document from David Hiez, Consultant at ESSFI, Leandro Morais at CIRIEC, Yvon Poirier at RIPESS and Françoise Wautiez at socioeco.org.

Suggested citation

Jenkins, Hamish, Ilcheong Yi, Samuel Bruelisauer and Kameni Chaddha. 2021. *Guidelines for Local Governments on Policies for Social and Solidarity Economy*. Geneva: UNRISD.



Endorsements

Solidarity has been a core value displayed by local and regional governments, especially throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, and it is in our DNA as an international municipal and territorial movement. It is of great value to see that this study, conducted by our member GSEF and their partner UNRISD, looks at the practices of our members with a deeper and scientific angle. This document provides important evidence and is a very useful reference for our learning tools to support the local economic development activities that our communities need.

Sara Hoeflich de Duque

United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)

The GSEF is a global network of local governments and SSE organizations working to serve as a hub for sharing visions and experiences for an inclusive, equitable and human-centered world.

These Guidelines provide a toolbox with rich experiences and lessons learnt on how to develop public policies and institutions for SSE at the city level. As SSE responds to concrete problems and challenges faced by citizens and local territories, these Guidelines will contribute to building greater awareness and recognition of the potential and strategic role of SSE, both now and in the post Covid-19 era, to better design an economic, social and ecological transition to a more inclusive, resilient and sustainable society.

Laurence Kwark

Global Social Economy Forum (GSEF)

Social and solidarity economy can be a powerful catalyst for transformative territorial processes capable of bridging between the response to the current global Covid-19 crisis and a transition to more just, resilient and sustainable societies.

At UNDP we believe that to fully unfold the potential of SSE it is crucial to recognize its inherently local dimension, promoted and enabled through integrated local development policies and systems.

We therefore highly value and welcome this relevant work, which turns solid research into concise and practical guidance for local authorities, thereby furthering the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals at the local level.

Andrea Agostinucci

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)



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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

THE SOCIAL AND SOLIDARITY ECONOMY (SSE) encompasses organizations and enterprises with social and often environmental objectives, guided by principles and practices of cooperation, solidarity and democratic self-management where decision-making power is not linked to the weight of held capital. Organizations, relations and activities that adhere to these distinctive principles are greatly varied. Existing laws on SSE in its various forms apply to a wide range of organizations and enterprises such as cooperatives, non-profit organizations, associations engaged in economic activity, mutuals (often formed to organize finance-related activities), foundations and enterprises that prioritize social and environmental goals over profit.

While SSE organizations and enterprises (SSEOs) often have comparative advantages in certain labour-intensive and employment centred activities, including the provision of collective goods and services to meet basic needs, broadening access to finance, managing common-pool resources, protecting the environment and regenerating and forward fitting economic systems, some are also active in more capital intensive forms of activity, such as manufacturing and processing. Patterns of production and consumption practised by SSEOs are more likely to be environmentally sustainable since they tend to be more sensitive to local environmental conditions than those of for-profit enterprises. In addition, SSE activity is often associated with localized circuits of production and exchange that are conducive not only to basic needs provisioning but also local economic development through income generation, boosting local demand and profits (or surpluses) that can be re-invested for more decent job creation within the enterprise or support for local community projects. Finally, besides their own economic activities, SSEOs are often engaged in broader civil society movements that lobby and challenge governments for better infrastructure and services and contribute to social cohesion through a variety of other social functions.

Interest in SSE has risen sharply in recent years, not least in the wake of crises—such as the global financial crisis of 2008 and the Covid-19 pandemic—when the search for an alternative to “business as usual” intensified among policy stakeholders and SSE is coming to be seen as a strategic means of implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This has been matched by concerted efforts from key international coalitions and alliances such as the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Social and Solidarity Economy (UNTFSSSE), the Intercontinental Network for Promotion of Social Solidarity Economy (RIPESS), the SSE International Forum (ESSFI, formerly known as the Mont-Blanc Meetings) and Global Social Economy Forum (GSEF), which have raised the visibility and deepened the understanding of SSE in international policy circles, in particular regarding its critical role in transforming social and economic relations and activities. The need to “localize the SDGs”, that is to contextualize and achieve the SDGs at the local level, has been emphasized by policy stakeholders and these organizations, which is the primary reason for the production of these *Guidelines for Local Governments*.

As awareness about the role of SSE in facilitating inclusive and sustainable development grows, an increasing number of governments, both at national and local or subnational levels, are adopting policies and programmes that aim to support SSEOs. Local or subnational governments (including municipal, provincial or state/regional levels of a federal government)¹ are increasingly interested in setting up public policies to promote and support SSE in the context of the growing importance given to local sustainable development policies (including quality local public services), but also widespread reduction of fiscal transfers from the central government (Yi et al. 2017). Caught between this fiscal pressure and increased service demands, local policy makers seek advice on which policies and programmes are most people-oriented while being cost-effective in achieving objectives associated with economic,

social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development in their jurisdictions. SSE is well placed to achieve these objectives because of its defining values and principles of community-centredness, democratic self-management, solidarity, ethics and cooperation within and beyond organizations. They have considerable potential to reduce inequalities in a local context. For instance, given the active participation of women, SSE can significantly contribute toward women's economic, social and political empowerment (Yi et al. 2018).

To promote SSE and realize its potential in the context of sustainable local development, policy makers and practitioners must ask the following questions: what are the enabling factors for establishing effective policies and programmes for SSE? Will these be feasible and well-adapted within their various legal, political and socioeconomic contexts? In addition to these questions, there are concerns among policy makers and SSE practitioners that public policies may cause tensions between the state and SSE. Top-down policy design and implementation without inclusion of SSE stakeholders should be avoided since they are often prone to fail and tend

to instrumentalize SSE to serve state, political or market interests (such as co-optation or clientelism).

Dialogue between SSE actors and policy makers at the local, national and international levels is a crucial element for enabling innovative policies. The institutionalization of participation in decision-making processes is a powerful tool to support the development of SSE. In some contexts, effective dialogue and participation can be better facilitated by non-governmental interlocutors which can carry and translate the demands of local actors and, more broadly, mediate the interaction between these actors and policy makers. However, findings and lessons from studies on participation and dialogue between the governments and SSE actors demonstrate that this process is not always smooth and collaborative. Participation and dialogue also create "struggle over the meaning of SSE" (Dinerstein 2013:6) and potential conflict. How the local public policy process mediates the participation and dialogue between different stakeholders is often determined by the skills used to reconcile diverse perspectives of the local policy stakeholders about broader economic, social or political issues.

Box 1.1. Social and solidarity economy at a glance

Social and solidarity economy is referred to using diverse terms and definitions reflecting national and regional history, culture and institutions. It is widespread and is having increasing impact on our economic, social and environmental lives. Since there are no globally accepted official methodologies and indicators specific to SSE, it is difficult to provide an overview of SSE activities across the world. However, some territorial and sectoral indicators demonstrate the contribution of SSE to economic and social development.

In the European Union, as of 2017, there were 2.8 million social economy entities, accounting for 6.3 percent of EU employment. Social economy actors are found in most sectors of the economy, from health and education to banking and utilities. Some are non-profits, but others are large enterprises with international outreach (CIRIEC and EESC 2017).

Globally, as of 2017, according to partial data, 279.4 million people were involved in cooperatives, one of the major forms of SSE organizations and enterprises, constituting at least 9.46 percent of the world's employed population. It is estimated that there are

- at least 375,375 cooperatives employing more than 1,939,836 people in Africa;
- at least 2,156,219 cooperatives employing more than 7,426,760 people in Asia;
- at least 2,391 cooperatives employing more than 75,438 people in Oceania;

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