

UN

Inter-Agency Task Force on
Social and Solidarity Economy

KNOWLEDGE HUB RESOURCES

Mapping of Intergovernmental Documentation on Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE)

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The logo consists of the letters 'UN' in a bold, white, sans-serif font, centered within a solid blue square.

Inter-Agency Task Force on
Social and Solidarity Economy

The UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Social and Solidarity Economy (TFSSE) was established to raise the visibility of the SSE in international knowledge and policy circles. We believe that SSE holds considerable promise for addressing the economic, social and environmental integrated approaches of sustainable development.

TFSSE brings together UN agencies and other intergovernmental organizations, as well as umbrella associations of SSE networks as members and observers. Task Force activities include organizing events at UN and other international conferences, dialoguing with policy makers, preparing and disseminating publications, and engaging in collaborative projects involving TFSSE members and observers. <https://unsse.org/>



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Mapping of Intergovernmental Documentation on Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE)

Introduction

In recent years there has been a marked increase in the level of interest of policy makers in the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE). While an expanding body of research is documenting the uptake of SSE discourse at the level of national governments, less is known about the level of interest of intergovernmental organizations in SSE. While many such organizations have a long history of support for specific SSE-related sectors such as cooperatives and non-profits, it is only relatively recently that they are referring to terms such as social economy, social enterprise, social entrepreneurship, social/solidarity finance, solidarity economy or SSE itself, within their policy statements, research and regulations.

The following study, conducted on behalf of the United Nations Task Force on SSE, reviews the extent to which intergovernmental organizations are talking the talk of SSE by referring to these terms. The organizations reviewed include regional organizations in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Middle East; global organizations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund; and specific groupings of governments such as the OECD, the G7 and G20. SSE organizations and networks comprising or established by national or local governments, such as the Leading Group on SSE, the Global Social Economy Forum (GSEF), Mercociudades, Metropolis and United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), are also included. A subsequent phase of this research will address more systematically the uptake of SSE terminology within United Nations organizations.

Understanding if and how the terminology of SSE is being adopted by intergovernmental organizations is important for gauging the prospects for crafting an enabling policy environment for SSE. Such organizations can play a key role in the diffusion of innovative approaches to development, nationally, regionally and internationally. Yet the following review confirms what has long been known about the trajectory of new, progressive or radical ideas when they enter the arena of mainstream development institutions. They are likely to be molded in ways that allow them to sit

comfortably with the existing institutional and political culture of the organization in question. In some contexts, this may mean that the new discourse of SSE represents a fundamentally progressive shift in approach. In others, radical concepts can be diluted with aspects of SSE essentially bolted on to or simply tweaking business as usual.

A number of trends that shed light on the substance of discursive and policy change are apparent. Three, in particular, stand out.

1. The uptake of SSE-related terminology within intergovernmental organizations has generally occurred in a context where policy makers have had to pay increasing attention to issues of social inclusion, inclusive growth and sustainability, particularly following the global financial crisis and in the context of the implementation of the UN development agenda associated with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and, more recently, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
2. Quite different interpretations of SSE or social economy are noticeable. Despite intra-regional variations, the widespread use of the term 'solidarity economy' in Latin America implies a critique of business as usual and suggests the need for a fundamentally different approach to development. This contrasts with the perspectives of many regional organizations in Asia and Africa, or international financial institutions, that tend to limit their interest in SSE to the promotion and scaling up of social enterprise and social entrepreneurship. This approach is more in keeping with the trend towards socially responsible enterprise that has been in vogue since the 1990s rather than a more fundamental questioning of dominant patterns of growth and distribution.
3. The trajectory of discursive change varies by organization. The widespread use of "social economy" within the European Union, for example, signals an attempt to go beyond a sectoral approach that, over several decades, had focused on cooperatives, mutual associations and non-profits. The use of this umbrella term acknowledges not only the fact that multiple types of organizations and enterprises share normative goals but that this ensemble constitutes a distinctive approach to development. Within IFIs and several Asian and African organizations, growing attention to social enterprise and social entrepreneurship reflects the attempt to add values of social inclusion onto the traditional focus on small and medium-sized enterprise development. Within several organizations, including for example, ECLAC and the World Bank, recent interest in social enterprise and social entrepreneurship represents the latest stage of development of policy approaches that centre on innovation.

The information in the pages that follow is, however, primarily descriptive; it simply documents the use of the SSE-related terms noted above within official statements and publications. Beyond, the broad observations just noted about variations in approach, we leave it to readers and future research to assess the substance of the discursive shifts that are occurring at the level of intergovernmental organizations.

AFRICA

African Development Bank (AfDB)

“Inclusive development is at the heart of the priorities of the African Development Bank. The African continent is ready for the development of the **social economy**,” African Development Bank President Donald Kaberuka stated at the national [conference on social business in Tunisia](#), organized by the African Development Bank’s Human Development Department and Yunus Social Business in 2013.

The 2013–2017 [Private Sector Development Strategy](#) of the AfDB signaled the “significant potential [of] **social enterprises and social businesses** [as] an effective way of fostering social innovation, entrepreneurship and value chain development. They can also be combined with microfinance to broaden effectiveness, development impact and sustainability”.

The Bank signaled its intention to support incubation projects that “will deepen understanding, help foster institutional environments and help establish financial vehicles (e.g. revolving funds) to assist **social enterprises**. The Bank will also consider direct financing, funding for incubators, awareness raising, technical assistance and capacity building to commercially viable social business schemes” p.16.

African Union

The [concept note](#) prepared for the Joint European Commission and African Union Commission Capacity Building Workshop on Social Protection in Africa—Sharing Experience on the Informal Economy, held in Nairobi in 2011, noted that:

Africa and the European Union are engaged in a Strategic Partnership built around 8 areas... As regards the Partnership on ‘Migration, Mobility and Employment’ (MME), [the] Action Plan focuses on the implementation of the Ouagadougou Action Plan and the global ‘Decent Work Agenda’ with special emphasis on the creation of more, more productive and better jobs in Africa and the link to social protection as well as to the informal and **social economy**.

At the [Special Session of the Labour and Social Affairs Commission of the African Union](#) (Windhoek, Namibia 23–25 April 2014), ministers agreed that **social economy** would be one of six key policy issues discussed at the forthcoming Summit of Heads of State and Government of the African Union.

At the Summit, held in Burkina Faso in 2014 to review progress in implementing the 2004 Ouagadougou Declaration and Plan of Action on Employment and Poverty

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