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## **The Interaction between Popular Economy, Social Movements and Public Policies**

*A Case Study of the Waste Pickers' Movement*

*Angelique J.W.M. van Zeeland*

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## Acronyms

<b>ARB</b>	Asociación de Recicladores de Bogotá ( <i>Waste Picker's Association of Bogota, Colombia</i> )
<b>BRL</b>	Brazilian real
<b>CIISC</b>	Comitê Interministerial de Inclusão Social e Econômica dos Catadores de Materiais Recicláveis ( <i>Interministerial Committee of Social And Economic Inclusion of Waste Pickers</i> )
<b>COOTRACAR</b>	Cooperativa dos Trabalhadores, Carroceiros e Catadores de Materiais Recicláveis ( <i>Waste Pickers' Cooperative in Gravataí, Brazil</i> )
<b>GDP</b>	Gross domestic product
<b>IBGE</b>	Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística ( <i>Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics</i> )
<b>KKPKP</b>	Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat ( <i>Union Of Waste Pickers in Pune, India</i> )
<b>MNCR</b>	Movimento Nacional dos Catadores de Materiais Recicláveis ( <i>Brazil's National Waste Pickers' Movement</i> )
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organization
<b>PMIRS</b>	Plan Maestro de Manejo Integral de Resíduos Sólidos ( <i>Master Plan of Integrated Waste Management</i> )
<b>PNAD</b>	Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios ( <i>National Household Sample Survey</i> )
<b>PNRS</b>	Política Nacional de Resíduos Sólidos ( <i>National Solid Waste Policy</i> )
<b>SENAES</b>	Secretaria Nacional de Economia Solidária ( <i>National Secretary of Solidarity Economy</i> )
<b>SIES</b>	Sistema de Informações em Economia Solidária ( <i>System of Information on Solidarity Economy</i> )
<b>SSE</b>	Social and Solidarity Economy
<b>SWaCH</b>	Solid Waste Collection Handling ( <i>Waste Pickers' Cooperative in Pune, India</i> )
<b>USD</b>	United States dollar

## **Summary**

This paper examines the challenges of expansion and sustainability of Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE), focusing on the interaction between popular economy and SSE, and stressing the importance of collective action and public policies to enable the transition from the informal economy toward SSE. The main focus is on the waste pickers' movement. Experiences from Latin America, Asia and Africa show the possibilities of incorporating a significant contingent of informal waste pickers in solidarity economy organizations. However the scaling up of SSE raises challenges for sustainability. The cases also show the need for political conditions to ensure an enabling environment as well as the need to strengthen SSE through effective capacity building to meet the demands that arise as a result of the newly shaped public policies.

Angelique van Zeeland is programme officer of Economic Justice at the Lutheran Foundation of Diakonia in Brazil, member of the National Council of Solidarity Economy and of the Advisory Group on Development Policy and Practice of ACT Alliance. She has a PhD in progress in Development Economics/UFRGS, researching evaluation and sustainability of solidarity economy.



## **Introduction: Challenges for Sustainability of SSE**

The increasing urbanization in developing countries in the 1960s and 1970s resulted in a growing informal sector. In the 1980s, many popular economic organizations arose, especially in the big Latin American cities. With high levels of unemployment in the 1990s, the informal economy grew and Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) also gained greater significance. Although in the 2000s, some countries, such as Brazil, showed a decrease in the level of unemployment, SSE is starting to establish itself as a relevant social and economic sector. It is a response to poverty and inequality, and has the potential to contribute to an alternative, sustainable and transformational development model. However the expansion of SSE is full of contradictions and challenges, which have to be faced.

This paper examines the challenges of expansion and sustainability of SSE, focusing on the interaction between popular economy and SSE, stressing the importance of collective action and public policies to enable the transition from the informal economy toward SSE. While the paper looks more broadly at the role of collective action in informal economy/SSE transition and in fostering an enabling policy environment, the main focus will be on the waste pickers' movement. Experiences from Latin America, Asia and Africa demonstrate the possibilities of incorporating a significant contingent of informal waste pickers in solidarity economy organizations. However the scaling-up of SSE presents challenges for sustainability. A central question is how to guarantee the core characteristics of growing SSE organizations, especially regarding features such as collective ownership, democratic self-management and equitable distribution of surplus between its members.

The first part will address the challenge of formalization, regarding the approach between informal popular economy and SSE. The second part focuses on advocacy, claims making and policy influence of coalitions of community groups, social movements and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), examining the process of strengthening of national, regional and international movements of waste pickers, stressing the importance of participatory processes. The last part deals with the effective implementation of public policies through innovative institutional arrangements involving solidarity economy organizations in waste management systems. The cases demonstrate the potential of expanding SSE through collective action and effective public policies that support a process of social transformation. However, they also show the need for political conditions to ensure an enabling environment for SSE as well as the need to strengthen SSE through effective capacity building to meet the demands that arise as a result of the newly shaped public policies.

## **Approaching Informal Popular Economy and Solidarity Economy**

Since the early 1970s, the concept of informal economy appears in the international development debates, encompassing experiences of the large share of economic units and workers that develop economic activities outside the formal regulatory environment. The informal economy is a major provider of employment and of goods and services for lower-income groups. According to Martha Chen (2012) informal employment comprises one-half to three-quarters of non-agricultural employment in developing countries. One of the main challenges is formalization, taking into account different meanings of the actors: for

policymakers, the main interest is the licence and taxes; the self-employed expect to receive the benefits, such as legal ownership and incentives; while for the informal workers, it means social protection.

Milton Santos (2004) refers to the upper and the lower circuit, defined through the set of activities, the sector of the population that participates, the technology used and the form of organization. The upper circuit uses capital-intensive technology; profit is the motor of commercial activity, and it is mainly the rich and middle classes who participate. The lower circuit uses labour intensive technology, which is often created or adapted to the local context. The economic rationality is based on survival, addressing the current needs of the people living in poverty in terms of consumption and need for employment; therefore absorbing surplus labour. The two circuits are related to each other in an unequal relationship, wherein the lower circuit depends upon the upper one.

The concept of popular economy has similarities with the concept of the lower circuit; both include a wide range of economic activities, developed individually or at a family level by the lower-income classes, with a specific economic rationality aiming to provide subsistence and reproduction of life of the members and their families (Kraychete and Santana 2012). Most of the economic units and self-employed who make up the popular economy operate in the informal economy.

In the 1990s, literature on SSE emphasizes the response to overcome poverty and inequality. Luis Razeto (1997) stresses the central role of labour. Paul Singer (2000) highlights solidarity as the most important aspect of the economic praxis. According to José Luis Coraggio, social economy must be seen as a “transitory phase of economic practices of transformational actions” to create a socioeconomic system organized by the principle of “expanded reproduction of life” (2007:37). The community-oriented aspect is highlighted by Ash Amin (2009), focusing on the mobilization of local resources and capabilities to meet local and social needs as well as human development. However, some critics point out that the lack of conceptual clarity regarding SSE and the inference made that everyone joins SSE because they ascribe by the principles can mask the fact that people might join it due to a lack of alternatives.

Contributions from the human development and capability approach stress the importance that “poverty must be seen as the deprivation of basic capabilities rather than merely as lowness of incomes” (Sen 2000:87) and propose a shift of focus from the

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