

Foreword

A series of rolling global crises - environmental, social, economic, and political - have exposed the shortcomings of our current development system. The social deficit and level of hardship and human suffering have increased over the last decades, in particular during the Covid-19 pandemic. This is partly due to the manner in which we've incentivized and governed economic behaviour in the last 40 years, as well as our overreliance on the power of the market, left to its own devices.

Although the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is steadily progressing, a number of challenges are yet to be addressed to make a transformative aspiration a reality. One of these challenges is how to embed the SDGs into our economic activities, relations and systems and align them through an integrated approach in which we explore linkages between goals and targets.

One vehicle that has the potential to make a big positive impact in addressing these challenges is the social and solidarity economy (SSE). The SSE is defined as Economic activities and market relations prioritising social (and often environmental) objectives over profit motives and which are guided by principles and practices of cooperation, solidarity and democratic self-control. A UNRISD study on the SSE in South Korea shows its importance in almost all economic sectors, contributing to all 17 SDGs.

It comes as no surprise that policymakers and practitioners are increasingly paying attention to the SSE as a viable alternative approach to development, rebalancing economic, social, environmental, and democratic objectives. Responding to this increasing interest in social and solidarity economy, several UN agencies including the ILO, UNRISD, and UN-NGLS organised an international conference on the 'Potential and Limits of Social and Solidarity Economy' in May 2013, the first of its kind within the UN system. This in turn led to the establishment of the UN Inter-Agency on Social and Solidarity Economy (UNTFSSSE), comprising UN agencies and international and regional organisations working in the SSE.

Since its establishment, the UNTFSSSE has played a significant role in raising awareness of the SSE and has called on the international development community to recognize it as an alternative paradigm of development and a means of implementation of the SDGs. One of the first initiatives of the UNTFSSSE was to establish an SSE Knowledge Hub with the aim of enhancing awareness of and contributing to the body of knowledge on the SSE. This encyclopaedia is one of the research outputs of this SSE Knowledge Platform.

Although the SSE can play a significant role in achieving the SDGs, it has not yet reached its full potential mainly due to a lack of it being mainstreamed in national policies and thinking mostly due to a lack of information and discussion on the SSE in the policymaking process and everyday lives. This encyclopaedia provides lessons and findings on the positive contribution of the SSE that prioritises people and the planet over profit and democratises the economy and society. It is available as a tool for education and communication on the SSE for all audiences and will assist policymakers, raise awareness and create opportunities to promote the SSE at international, national and local levels.

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