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Recent developments in the promotion of the social and solidarity economy: Highlights for Africa

Key points

- ▶ This document provides an overview of recent global and regional developments relevant to the African Union (AU) Ten-year Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) Strategy and Implementation Plan.
- ▶ It reflects the commitment of the AU and the International Labour Organization (ILO) to promote the SSE for flourishing, inclusive and prosperous societies in line with the aspirations of Agenda 2063.

Introduction

Through its Ten-Year SSE Strategy and Implementation Plan (2023-2032) the African Union (AU) aims to establish an enabling and supportive environment for the SSE that contributes to a more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable development path for the African continent. It seeks to increase the identity, visibility, and recognition of the SSE in Africa in order to harness its potential to improve the quality of life of citizens, create decent work, facilitate empowerment, reduce poverty and inequalities in health, education and gender, to be resilient in the face of economic, health and environmental crises, and to employ social innovations and contribute to the African Cultural Renaissance.

The AU envisions a prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development, democracy, and respect for human rights, on common heritage, shared values and ethics, and whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth. The ILO's extensive experience and unique mandate within the United Nations system to promote cooperatives and the broader SSE positions it as a leading partner in implementing this strategy.

The AU's Ten-Year SSE Strategy and Implementation Plan is a critical framework that aligns with global trends and good practices in SSE promotion. By building on past achievements and fostering a coordinated approach, the AU is well-positioned to leverage the SSE for sustainable and inclusive development.

This document provides an overview of recent global and regional developments relevant to the African Union (AU) Ten-year Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) Strategy and

Implementation Plan. The focus is on the period since the unanimous adoption by the representatives of governments, employers and workers at the International Labour Conference of a [Resolution concerning decent work and the SSE](#) in June 2022, which notably included the first international definition of the SSE.

► Definition of the social and solidarity economy

The SSE encompasses enterprises, organizations and other entities that are engaged in economic, social, and environmental activities to serve the collective and/or general interest, which are based on the principles of voluntary cooperation and mutual aid, democratic and/or participatory governance, autonomy and independence, and the primacy of people and social purpose over capital in the distribution and use of surpluses and/or profits as well as assets. SSE entities aspire to long-term viability and sustainability, and to the transition from the informal to the formal economy and operate in all sectors of the economy. They put into practice a set of values which are intrinsic to their functioning and consistent with care for people and planet, equality and fairness, interdependence, self-governance, transparency and accountability, and the attainment of decent work and livelihoods. According to national circumstances, the SSE includes cooperatives, associations, mutual societies, foundations, social enterprises, self-help groups and other entities operating in accordance with the values and principles of the SSE.

Source: ILO Resolution concerning decent work and the social and solidarity economy (10 June 2022); United Nations General Assembly Resolution 77/281 of 18 April 2023, entitled "Promoting the social and solidarity economy for sustainable development".

Global developments

The ILO Resolution marked a turning point in the promotion of the SSE at the international level. In addition to defining the SSE, it provided guiding principles to address challenges and opportunities and specified the roles of governments and the social partners, as well as the role of the International Labour Office. Moreover, it noted that, recognizing the relevance of the SSE to its mandate since the founding of the Organization, the ILO has led the promotion of the SSE within the United Nations (UN) system, including through standards-related action. In follow-up to the Resolution, in 2022 the ILO adopted a [Strategy and Action Plan \(2023-2029\) concerning decent work and the SSE](#). It focuses on improving the understanding of related realities and needs and increasing capacities to promote decent work in and through the SSE in a coherent manner. To increase coherence in SSE promotion at the international level, the ILO contributes to the [United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on SSE \(UNTFSSSE\)](#), which it co-founded and co-chairs.

The adoption of [United Nations General Assembly \(UNGA\) Resolution 77/281](#) of 18 April 2023, entitled “Promoting the social and solidarity economy for sustainable development”, further elevated the significance and recognition of the SSE globally. It encouraged Member States, relevant entities of the UN development system, as well as multilateral, international and regional financial institutions and development banks to support the SSE. To contribute to its effective implementation, the [UNTFSSSE adopted a Strategic Action Plan \(2024-2026\)](#), emphasizing policy coherence, education and research, financial and non-financial support, and statistics as its priority areas.

The Ten-Year SSE Strategy and Implementation Plan (2023-2032) significantly contribute to the implementation of the ILO and UN resolutions, which build on efforts to promote the SSE in Africa. The ILO Regional Conference on Social Economy, Africa’s Response to the Global Crisis in 2009, and SSE Academies in Morocco (2013) and Johannesburg (2015) provided significant groundwork in that regard. Furthermore, African leaders played key roles in developing both resolutions. With the recently revised terms of reference of the UNTFSSSE, the adoption of the Strategy and Implementation Plan enables the AU to become a member of the UNTFSSSE.

Several other international initiatives offer the AU opportunities for collaboration and knowledge sharing on the promotion of the SSE. In December 2021, the [European Commission adopted a new action plan on the social economy](#). The [Recommendation on Social and](#)

[Solidarity Economy and Social Innovation](#) was adopted by the OECD Council at Ministerial level in June 2022 on the proposal of the Local Employment and Economic Development Committee (LEED). The Council of the European Union adopted [Council Recommendation of 27 November 2023 on developing social economy framework conditions](#). The [Ibero-American Network for the Promotion of the SSE](#) was launched in January 2024. While the Asia-Pacific region has not had a government-led regional effort on the SSE, there has been increasing interest at the regional and country levels, as discussed in the ILO’s regional workshop on [SSE for Advancing the Sustainable Development Goals in Asia-Pacific](#), which took place in June 2024.

Developments in Africa

Policy initiatives on the SSE have been on the rise across Africa. Cabo Verde in 2016, Cameroon and Djibouti in 2019, Tunisia in 2020 and Senegal in 2021 have enacted framework laws on the SSE. National frameworks are under development in Algeria, Gabon, Mali, Morocco and South Africa, among others. Significant recent events have further underscored the continent’s commitment to the SSE. The Global Social Economy Forum (GSEF) held in Dakar, Senegal in May 2023 brought together global and regional SSE leaders. [The GSEF2023 Dakar Declaration](#) recognized that as the first Forum in Africa, it was an exceptional event for the internationalization of the SSE on the continent. Following this, [the first African Forum for the Social and Solidarity Economy \(ForaESS\)](#) took place in Yaoundé, Cameroon, in May 2024 and adopted a [resolution](#).

The ILO is deeply invested in supporting the SSE across African countries in response to specific needs and opportunities. The results of the AU-ILO mapping studies on the SSE in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Kenya, Madagascar, Nigeria and Zambia have been analysed and synthesized. ILO briefs on providing care through the social and solidarity economy, including one on [Zimbabwe](#), were launched at the International Labour Conference in June 2024. The Conference adopted a [Resolution concerning decent work and the care economy](#), which notably called for a conducive environment for SSE entities. The [online self-learning modules for awareness raising on the SSE](#), developed for the UNTFSSSE by the ILO and its International Training Centre in Turin, are available in Arabic, English, French, Portuguese, Spanish and Swahili, among other languages.

The ILO is supporting the promotion of decent work in and through the SSE across the continent. In Cameroon, the ILO is supporting the development of the SSE institutional framework and fostering economic

development and social cohesion between refugee and host communities by developing women's entrepreneurship and cooperatives in agricultural value chains. In Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya, Mali, Nigeria and Uganda, ILO projects are accelerating SSE employment opportunities and supporting the elimination of child labour through SSE entities in key supply chains. In Côte d'Ivoire, Mali and Senegal, the ILO is working with producer cooperatives on green technology transition. In Kenya, the ILO has supported the development of the new Cooperative Transformation Strategy. In Morocco and Tunisia, ILO projects targeting SSE entities of young people, women and agricultural communities are yielding impactful results. In Sierra Leone, the ILO is actively involved in legislative work to enhance the Cooperative Act. In Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan and Uganda, the ILO is supporting the integration of refugees and host communities into the local economies via the SSE. In Tanzania the ILO has supported the digitalization of cooperative registrars. The ILO is also seeking to address occupational safety and health deficits in agriculture through cooperatives in Côte d'Ivoire, Mali and Uganda. These initiatives are just highlights of the ILO's activities to advancing the SSE across Africa. The implementation of the AU Strategy on SSE is bound to amplify the ILO's and other UN agencies' efforts in enhanced collaboration with the AU, further bolstering support for the SSE in the continent.

Statistical systems are crucial for monitoring progress. Legal frameworks in countries like Djibouti, Cabo Verde, Senegal, and Tunisia support SSE statistical development, often by mandating dedicated satellite accounts. In 2023, the ILO's 21st International Conference of Labour Statisticians presented a [roadmap towards guidelines concerning statistics of the SSE](#). The Conference discussed [progress on implementing the Guidelines concerning cooperative statistics based on pilot testing](#), notably in Tanzania, and initiated a roadmap towards guidelines concerning SSE statistics. Moving forward, the ILO will establish two technical working groups: one on SSE Statistics in collaboration with the UNFSSSE, and another on measuring cooperatives' economic contribution in partnership with the [Committee for the Promotion and Advancement of Cooperatives \(COPAC\)](#).

Africa's SSE landscape. Implementing the strategy effectively entails establishing a conducive environment consistent with the nature and diversity of the SSE to promote decent work and harness the fullest potential of SSE entities, in line with fundamental principles and rights at work, other human rights and relevant international labour standards. In particular, ensuring that entities and workers in the SSE benefit from freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining enables social dialogue through the most representative organizations of employers and workers for shaping measures which directly affect entities and workers of the SSE and, where appropriate, with relevant and representative organizations of the SSE entities concerned.

► Guiding principles of the AU SSE Strategy



Human rights

Gender-sensitivity

Inclusivity – leaving no one behind

Decent work

Multisectoral and multidisciplinary

Multi-statutes approach, integrating national particularities

Participation

Sustainability

Local development

Accordingly, the effective implementation of the AU Ten-Year SSE Strategy and Implementation Plan (2023-2032) is expected to significantly contribute to sustainable development and the realization of the aspirations of the [AU Agenda 2063](#) and other global development agendas. The ongoing collaboration between the AU, ILO and other partners will be pivotal in ensuring that these transitions are effective, equitable and sustainable.

Looking forward

The AU Ten-Year SSE Strategy and Implementation Plan (2023-2032) sets the stage for significant transitions in

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