



OECD
Global Action

Promoting
Social & Solidarity
Economy Ecosystems



SOCIAL SOLIDARITY ECONOMY

A people centred
approach to
internationalisation
with feminist principles
taking centre stage.

© OECD 2022



OECD
Global Action

Promoting
**Social & Solidarity
Economy** Ecosystems

SOCIAL SOLIDARITY ECONOMY

**A people centred
approach to
internationalisation
with feminist principles
taking centre stage.**

PLP outcome report

This report is developed by 18 organisations from 11 countries that joined forces in an effort to provide insights into how to foster the internationalisation of Social Solidarity Economy (SSE) organisations with a special attention to the role of women in it. It is the result of this collaboration in identifying cases that illustrate the specific motivations and strategies that SSE organisations adopt to internationalise, a possible roadmap that would unlock the replicability and adoption of proven solutions globally and how women's perspectives could play a strategic role in facilitating the process of internationalisation. Locally embedded action, agents' participation and international enabling coordination seem to be some of the unavoidable ingredients for a successful SSE that can internationalise with more ease and to which feminist principles can highly contribute.



**Funded by
the European Union**

This document, as well as any data and map included herein, are without prejudice to the status of or sovereignty over any territory, to the delimitation of international frontiers and boundaries and to the name of any territory, city or area.



Foreword

About OECD global action “promoting social and solidarity Economy ecosystems”

In 2020, the OECD launched the Global Action “Promoting Social and Solidarity Economy Ecosystems”, funded by the European Union’s Foreign Partnership Instrument, that will cover more than 30 countries over a period of three years. This work targets all EU countries as well as several non-EU countries such as Brazil, Canada, India, Korea, Mexico and the United States.

As part of the OECD and EU strategic objectives to promote inclusive, smart, resilient and sustainable growth, this project aims to:

- Support the social and solidarity economy (SSE), including social enterprise development and internationalisation
- Raise awareness and build capacity for conducive national and local ecosystems for SSE development
- Promote knowledge-sharing and other exchanges at the international level

Acknowledgements

This paper was prepared by the Peer Learning Partnership (PLP) consortium led by the Impact Hub Network and it is co-authored by its partners: European Association for Local Development (AEIDL), Amsterdam Impact, Aspire Impact, City of Austin, Cooperative Alliance (COOP), Centre for Social Innovation, Distrito-Tec, European Business and Innovation Centre Network (EBN), EMES Research Network, European Venture Philanthropy Association (EVPA), GIZ/BMZ, Groupe SOS, Italian Forum for the Third Sector, EU Joint Research Centre (JRC), KU Leuven, Centro CEMEX-TEC, São Paulo State Government and Instituto Nacional de la Economía Social (INAES).

The authors thanks Alberto Masetti-Zannini, Mariana Nunes, Aneta Quraishy and André Maciel for facilitating the partners collaboration and compiling this paper from the research conducted by the consortium, as well as Filip De Beule, Lorena Pulido, Mariana Nunes and Arvind Sridharan for their leading role in researching the champion cases used as sources. Thank you to Max Bulakovskiy for his overall guidance.

This report benefited from valuable comments by members of the consortia organisations, in particular Agnès Mathis, Amal El Ghadfa, Arnaldo da Silva Júnior, Chris Schreck, Christian Gmelin, Egon Van Wees, Elisa Dries, Ellen Oetelmans, Ewa Konczal, Francesco Gentili, Gianluca Gaggiotti, Heleen Heysse, Mariana Heredia, Mariana Zamudio, Pénélope Silice, Rocio Nogales, Tonya Surman and Valentina Caimi.

JEL reference codes: Q01: Sustainable Development, F2: International Factor Movements and International Business.

Keywords: social and solidarity economy, social enterprise, feminism, women, internationalisation.

This document was prepared by Impact Hub GmbH in the framework of OECD Global Action “Promoting Social & Solidarity Economy Ecosystems”. The opinions and arguments expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official views of the OECD or its member countries.

Comments on Working Papers are welcomed, and may be sent to Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities (CFE), OECD, 2 rue André-Pascal, 75775 Paris Cedex 16, France.

This document was produced with the financial assistance of the European Union. The views expressed herein can in no way be taken to reflect the official opinion of the European Union.

Table of contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Foreword | 3 |
| Executive Summary | 6 |
| Chapter 1: Rationale | 7 |
| Background | 8 |
| Peer learning approach and its objectives | 9 |
| Chapter 2: Findings | 11 |
| Local solutions can help solve global problems | 12 |
| Internationalisation can be facilitated via networks and alliances | 15 |
| The support needed to unlock potentially global solutions | 18 |
| ‘Women principles’ are applicable to SSE organisations’ internationalisation process | 23 |
| Chapter 3: Conclusions | 27 |
| Building compelling narratives | 28 |
| Enhance of the role of enablers | 28 |
| Recognise and foster female leadership principles | 29 |
| Annex A. Consortium partners | 30 |
| Annex B. Cases Database | 32 |
| References | 35 |
| Footnotes | 38 |
| Figures | 24 |
| Figure 1. Main female principles | |
| Tables | 10 |
| Table 1. Champion Cases | |



Executive Summary

Social and solidarity economy (SSE) organisations are encouraged to grow their impact and scale, and to internationalise by whichever model they deem appropriate (such as open sourcing, diffusion, replication, social franchising, branching, etc.). This is driven by the demand of communities around the world that face similar social issues and SSE can offer solutions that are internationally relevant. Despite this, most SSE organisations remain local, which in turn puts a brake on solving the global issues of development.

This report focuses on the process of internationalisation¹ of SSE organisations, and gives specific attention to the role of women in this process. The social and solidarity economy is an umbrella concept designating social and solidarity economy enterprises and organizations, in particular cooperatives, mutual benefit societies, associations, foundations, non-profits and social enterprises, which have the specific feature of producing goods, services and knowledge while pursuing both economic and social aims and fostering solidarity (Borzaga, Salvatori and Bodini, 2017).

In an effort to provide insights into how to foster the internationalisation of SSE organisations, a group of 18 organizations from 11 countries joined forces. They collaborated in identifying cases that illustrate the specific motivations and strategies that SSE organisations adopt to reach international markets, a possible roadmap that would unlock the replicability and adoption of proven solutions globally and how women's perspectives could play a strategic role in facilitating the process of internationalisation. The key findings and conclusions that emerged from this collaborative process include:

- **The importance of building compelling narratives that are locally relevant and globally connected.** This is particularly true considering the universality of problems such as climate change or health or gender equality, to mention a few. Even though these are global issues, SSE organisations need flexibility to adapt their approach in different locations due to contextuality.
- **The key role of enablers such as umbrella organisations, international networks and universities.** Internationalisation needs to be further supported with partnerships for soft landing, improving access to resources, reaching international markets through established networks and tools that facilitate knowledge sharing and foster cross-border collaboration.
- **Essential characteristics identified within women-led SSE organisations can open new opportunities for SSE organisations in an internationalisation process.** Principles such as collaboration, culture of listening, bottom-up approach and flexibility, can help build successful local partnerships, adapt solutions to local needs and build relevant narratives that can inspire others.

CHAPTER 1

Rationale



OECD
Global Action

Promoting
Social & Solidarity
Economy Ecosystems





Background

The Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) contributes to the sustainable development by building inclusive economies and societies. The OECD Global Action Promoting Social and Solidarity Economy Ecosystems launched in 2020, seeks to: support the SSE, including social enterprise development and internationalisation; raise awareness and capacity to build conducive national and local ecosystems for SSE development; and promote knowledge and exchanges at the international level.

SSE organisations often tackle social and environmental problems that are globally prevalent, such as agricultural sustainability, healthcare service delivery, education, clean energy, microlending, the circular economy or digital illiteracy, to name a few examples (Neessen, Voinea and Dobber, 2021), **by providing solutions that are internationally relevant.** Due to the challenging nature of these social issues, no economic sector (public sector, private sector and third sector) alone has been able to sufficiently address them. Social entrepreneurs have stepped up by developing innovative business models and solutions and in doing so, partnering with governments, academia, NGOs and foundations, and/or private businesses to tackle these issues.

Social enterprises (SEs), a subgroup of SSEs, take a business-oriented approach to tackle social problems (Neessen, Voinea and Dobber, 2021). While their legal status may take different forms, ranging from non-profits to for-profit organisations (or a combination thereof), they all have a declared primary mission to create social value while seeking to be financially sustainable by generating revenue. The social value element here is key – the collective benefit to a community and the wider world.

The COVID-19 pandemic has made clear that challenges do not respect borders and in the same way neither do solutions (Heintz, Staab and Turquet, 2021). Many individuals and communities have worked to find local solutions to the challenges being faced and to generate collective growth with the opportunities at hand (OECD, 2021). The COVID-19 crisis calls for a re-balancing of efficiency and resilience throughout the economy. In this context the SSE can develop a much larger role in the post-COVID phase to inspire transformation to a more inclusive and sustainable economy and society. (OECD, 2020).

Given that SSE organisations often find solutions to social issues via an innovative approach that can be applied in a global context such as Shifo Foundation (see Box 2), they should learn how to capitalise on this international appeal and actively participate outside their home or local context either by themselves or with strategic partners who can add further value to the organisation (van Lunenburg, Geuijen and Meijer, 2020).

Moreover, whilst the SSE sector prides itself with being an inclusive sector, barriers faced by women within growing SSE organisations remain significantly higher than their male counterparts (Py and Barthélemy, 2019) and the integration of gender equality in SSE is often lacking. The SSE workforce in many contexts is majority of women (66% in Europe, 80% in Africa, and 70% in Canada, for example) (RIPESS, n.d.), and despite their contribution to developing the economy by providing essential services to their communities, creating companies and jobs, and supporting the socio-economic vitality of their territories, women still face challenges rooted in traditional gender norms and gender inequality. These include legal, cultural, societal, educational and prejudice considerations that prevent the effective design of policy, support offerings and funding mechanisms. According to the [Gender Social Norms Index](#) (GSNI), about half of the world's men and women feel that men make better political leaders, and over 40 percent feel that men make better business executives and that men have more right to a job when jobs are scarce.

In order to develop a strong and resilient SSE, capable of reaching an international scope, it is needed to address the pressing issues around us. This requires not only to look into the challenges faced by women,



but understand their contribution, principles and values they bring to the SSE development and work towards a more inclusive and conducive SSE ecosystem.

Peer learning approach and its objectives

Peer learning partnerships (PLP) represent a way through which members of the SSE and beyond, organized in consortiums, exchange ideas, reflections and agree on findings and proposals on a particular topic to promote learning and guide further action. In this particular PLP, the topics of internationalisation and the role of women are in the spotlight.

This report is the result of a collaborative approach of a consortium that relied on the range and diversity of its partners considering: geographic presence, working language, cultural formation, role within the SSE ecosystem and visions for the future of the SSE (see Annex a). This range and this diversity not only reflect the ambition for the PLPs set out by the OECD, but also do justice to the richness of the SSE itself. The PLP process was designed to empower its partners to offer their individual perspectives and converge insights through knowledge exchanges and facilitated group workshops, subgroups and peer assessment exercises. The consortium started working by sharing comments and opinions around six initial guiding questions around the topics of internationalisation and women in the SSE:

- How can we speed up international reach for SSE organisations (access to markets, replicable business and governance models, overseas partnerships, scaling, etc.)?
- What are the models (i.e. financial, governance, etc) that best preserve inclusion and avoid mission drift at international scale?
- How can we align international SSE ecosystems around commonly identified missions?
- How can SSEs benefit from global value chains and vice-versa?
- What are effective funding and investment approaches that ensure women-led SSE enterprises have more chances of succeeding in all venture stages?
- How do we create a 360o ecosystem of support services that address the gender gap and social economic diversity within the SSE sector?

After the distillation of key concepts, the consortium defined its Key Learning Objectives (KLOs) as:

- Entrepreneurs motivations and strategies: identify and capture SSE organisations-specific motivations and strategies to internationalise and the needed support associated with this;
- Global replication and adoption of solutions: propose a roadmap that would make proven local SSE solutions become available to be globally replicated and adopted by identifying key aspects and elements to do so;
- Women's perspectives: identify how women's perspectives can be brought into SSE to ensure that their values and principles strengthen the resilience of SSE and its internationalisation processes.

Consortium participants suggested case studies that could indicate learning opportunities and recommendations to the KLOs. In total, 43 different cases were submitted and formed a database (see Annex B.) including each case summary, indication to which KLO it relates to, its geographic location and links to full reports and contact information.

PLP partners formed subgroups around each KLO with the mission to select from the database up to three champion cases to deep dive into with further research, group discussion, interviews with key stakeholders and peer reviews in order to tackle the question at hand. The eight champion cases (see Table 1) were selected based on criteria such as: potential of contribution and alignment with the KLO, maturity and



success of the organisation and diversity of geographic locations, industries, products and services.

Table 1. Selected Champion Cases

Selected case studies per Key Learning Objective

| Entrepreneurs Motivations and Strategies | Global Replication and Adoption of Solutions | Women’s Perspectives |
|---|---|---|
| WHYFARM – Trinidad and Tobago | Social Challenges Innovation Platform – EU | Sheroes – India |
| Close the Gap – Belgium | Coopedia Knowledge Base – EU | Semilla de Dioses – Mexico |
| Shifo Foundation - Sweden | | Socially responsible public procurement and gender-responsive public procurement - EU |

CHAPTER 2

Findings



OECD
Global Action

Promoting
Social & Solidarity
Economy Ecosystems





Local solutions can help solve global problems

In this section, the application of local solutions to global issues is unpacked with a look at the relevance of local innovation to the global problematique with specific reference to three internationalisation cases of social enterprises. The link between local and global relevance, the importance of proof of concept and the need for flexibility and adaptability are demonstrated as essential contributors to viable internationalisation.

These examples illustrate how social entrepreneurs worldwide have come up with creative and innovative solutions to given social problems. However, organisations of the SSE often struggle to internationalise as a result of its tendency to inward-looking; its tendency to focus exclusively in their local context (Blundel & Lyon, 2015). However it happens while solutions could already be readily applied elsewhere through various forms of internationalisation, ranging from control-based scaling to open-sourcing. In many cases, however, the route is rather via collaboration with local organisations and initiatives for local implementation of the solution. These can draw on international best practice examples, such as the following short case studies which demonstrate successful collaborative cross-border scaling models in tackling global issues as they manifest in local contexts.

The local issues SSE tackle are universal

A major reason for the internationalisation of social enterprises is the prevalence of social needs in human society across the globe. And as internationalisation across borders is bound to costs and barriers, connecting the SSE solution to the universality of the issue can be a powerful driver of (successful) internationalisation.

Some social enterprises, such as WHYFARM (see Box 1) from Trinidad Tobago, might begin domestically; as different solutions to pressing and relevant issues are explored at home; before gradually expanding internationally. Other ventures might start by focusing on a world region, and then expand over time, like ColaLife (ColaLife, 2021); and still, other social ventures are born global² and may begin tackling international social opportunities from the start, like the Impact Hub Network (Bachmann, 2013).

Box 1. Champion case: WHYFARM – Trinidad and Tobago

Growing the future feeders bottom up!

By 2050, the world's population is expected to be almost 10 billion people, and because of the aging demographics of farmers, declining participation by youth in agriculture and their perceived disinterest, it is of critical concern how we will achieve food and nutrition security. Our youth will be responsible for future food production. Novel approaches are therefore needed to rebrand agriculture as an appealing and crucial activity, as well as a means to a sustainable livelihood.

In order to tackle the planet's sustainability issues, it is also essential that agriculture continues to be carried out across the globe with a short food supply chain model in mind, which can be extremely important in addressing the environmental challenges in the decades ahead.

In 2015 Alpha Sennon started WHYFARM (We Help You-th Farm), an NGO in Trinidad and Tobago that raises awareness about the world food crisis by working with children between the ages of 7 and 12, as well as young adults between the ages of 17 and 35. Through "Agri-Edutainment", including workshops, training sessions, school tours, comics and storybooks, WHYFARM promotes the importance of sustainable agriculture and engages youth in the fight against

OECD
Global ActionPromoting
Social & Solidarity
Economy Ecosystems

global food and nutrition insecurity in Latin America, Europe and Africa. It focuses not only on developing countries but has also entered more economically advanced countries given the agricultural challenges worldwide.

A key reason for the internationalization of this social enterprise is the prevalence of the issue it tackles in societies across the globe. WHYFARM also used networking as its main strategy to collaborate for its internationalization. The social enterprise participated in competitions, conferences, won awards and got multiple features in magazines. Having access to a global network and informing them about your social innovation can open many international doors. Pitching the business idea at the Thought For Food Global Summit was a turning point in WHYFARM's scaling process. This event gave the founder the confidence to push its internationalization forward.

Source: <https://whyfarmit.org>

Local proof leading to global application

In order to gain legitimacy, develop a network and get access to resources, SSE organisations seeking to internationalise should develop a strong social impact story where a proven local solution is connected to the universality of the issue. Social impact measurement is complicated by the persistent challenge to establish clear causal links between what organisations do and the impact that is created. Methodological developments, such as the increasing use of contribution analysis and mixed methods approaches in evaluation, help address this challenge, but doing this in a credible manner takes data, expertise, and resources that are usually in short supply in the social and solidarity economy. (OECD, 2021b)

Through trial and error, or learning by doing an SSE organisation that wants to scale can establish a proof of concept³ before considering going international. A successful pilot, with data being collected during the development stage proving social impact, can go a long way in convincing others to follow suit and testing conditions for internationalisation. For instance, when the Shifo Foundation ([see Box 2](#)) was able to develop its proof of concept in Uganda, this success story spread to neighbouring countries enabling introduction and entry into these new markets who face similar challenges

Box 2. Champion case: Shifo Foundation - Sweden

MyChild Solution

The effective and efficient delivery of child health services is a pressing issue in low-income countries. Both preventive care measures (such as vaccines) and routine check-ups need significant improvements in coverage and consistency. To tackle these issues, Shifo Foundation, a social enterprise based in Sweden, has developed MyChild Solution (earlier MyChild System), first as a point-of-care electronic system, and then subsequently introducing "MyChild Card" based on Smart Paper Technology, as Shifo focused on regions with low resources and irregular access to electricity and internet, also illustrating the issue and impact of the digital divide. MyChild Card is provided to every child who receives preventive health services. Thanks to the Smart Paper Technology, the cards can be scanned into a database that generates reports (per child, health centre or district), as well as follow-up lists for efficient mobilisation and reliable data for better decision making across the healthcare chain.

Shifo adapted its product and business model to make it more viable. By working with partners and locally-based NGOs (e.g. ActionAid, Plan International, etc.), Shifo has managed to spread knowledge about MyChild Solution



worldwide, and currently operates in 5 countries – Uganda, Afghanistan, Gambia, Kenya and Haiti. Where a country is unable to fund the implementation of the MyChild Solution on its own but has the funding for the operating and maintenance costs, then donors support the implementation of the system. Then, over a five-year period, donors gradually reduce their share of the operating and maintenance costs, as the local government takes an increasing portion.

Source: <https://shifo.org>

While implementing its first fully-digital solution in one local context, Shifo Foundation already found investors willing to support their scaling in other contexts. In addition, thanks to usage data collected at an early stage, they observed that the adoption rate was going down, and soon realised they needed to change their model in order to build a strong and effective solution that could be relevant and maintained in the long-term. This triggered/led to the conceptualisation of a hybrid solution, i.e. the Smart Paper Technology, which would better fit low-resource settings in which they were scaling into.

Need for flexibility and adaptation to local context

Despite this apparent match between the universality of the problem and the solution, many barriers to internationalisation of innovations exist and require more or less attention to adaptation within the given context. One such potential barrier to this potential symbiosis between the universality of the social issue and its solution in a specific local context is the fact that problems are often more specifically embedded in the dynamics of a specific local context. So, while the problems addressed by SSE organisations are widespread in many countries, the internationalisation process or product often needs tailoring to the specificities of the local context as the forces underlying these social issues differ across countries.

This adaptation is often easier if the solution was developed for the local market rather than at a distance. WHYFARM, for instance, was able to quickly ascertain the problem and potential solution to agricultural sustainability education in its home market. When internationalising, ongoing adaptation and further localisation will be necessary.

Sometimes solutions developed might not work initially and need to be readjusted. When the Shifo Foundation started, they had developed a fully digital healthcare solution given that the world was focusing on digital transformation and the power of digital solutions. However, it turned out that this solution did not work everywhere and healthcare workers and hospitals in developing countries struggled to implement it, resulting in declining take-up over time rather than increased. The product was therefore adapted to meet essential local requirements of affordability, user friendliness, and independence from the need for equipment and internet in the field, putting quality of data and service delivery at the heart of the solution.

Furthermore, SSE organisations should not underestimate the importance of building trust-based partnerships with local stakeholders for access to data and relevant information, especially local governments. These relations should help the internationalising organisation in developing a bottom-up approach as well as in overcoming barriers and resistance issues by learning from the main (local) stakeholders.

In the SSE sector there is a greater willingness to share knowledge(Miller, 2010), models and intellectual



property than in traditional businesses. Coopedia Knowledge Base (see Box 3), for example, is an online knowledge platform that gathers, reviews and openly shares valuable resources (guides, articles, videos and more) on cooperative entrepreneurship to catalyse the movement and improve local development. To find relevant information to your local problem, inspiring new references can be accessed from different localities around the globe based on the experiences shared on Coopedia.

Box 3. Champion case: Coopedia Knowledge Base - EU

International index of resources for cooperative contributors and searchers

Created in 2020 by Cooperatives Europe and the International Cooperative Alliance (ACI), Coopedia Knowledge Base is an innovative and collaborative search engine that compiles a wide range of learning resources on cooperative entrepreneurship in different languages. The tool has two types of users: Collaborators (users who index material and resources on cooperative entrepreneurship) and Resource Seekers (entrepreneurs, students or anyone who wants to know more about the entrepreneurial aspect of cooperatives).

Source: <https://coopedia.starter.coop/en/>

Internationalisation can be facilitated via networks and alliances

In this section, the critical role of networks and alliances in providing access to resources and local partners that support networking, soft landing and mission safeguarding within new markets is described through two case studies of internationalising SSE organisations.

Networking to overcome complex institutional context

Networking is an important part of the internationalisation. Although partners can assist in enabling access to local stakeholders and in delivering the solution to the local beneficiaries, SSE organisations should not ignore their own role in this process - either in coordinating the process and engaging local stakeholders directly, leading to relationships and trust-building. Depending on their function in the ecosystem, SSE organisations may play a variety of roles: as the entity internationalising itself, as a provider of resources (capital, mentoring, knowledge), as a business partner, as academia, as a policymaker, and others.

One key challenge of social enterprises when internationalising is the complexity of institutional contexts (Muñoz and Kibler, 2016). As an organisation coming from countries with well-functioning institutions, it can be difficult to properly absorb the risks of investing in a country with lower-quality institutions. Daily corruption, and more generally, institutional voids make it more difficult to operate, such as import goods and run daily operations.

This challenge is particularly evident for the organisations seeking to internationalise because they are subject to the issue of “double embeddedness” (Baker and Faulkner, 2009). This occurs because the internationalising SSE organisation is obligated to face stakeholders (donors, government officials, beneficiaries, NGOs, etc.) in more than one country, which creates greater challenges for acquiring resources and building relationships with the local stakeholders essential for the organisation’s success in the new market.

Most cases do not strategically decide upon location but are often driven by existing networks.



SSE organisations often choose to use their own background, their existing networks of funders, collaborators and partners in deciding where to go. When the Shifo Foundation received its first grant from IKARE, it took advantage of IKARE's experience and expertise to grow into Uganda. Similar connections led to a trial in the Gambia. These two initiatives led to similar further ventures in neighbouring countries where international organisations also financed their projects. In the case of WHYFARM, they often made use of international competitions and invitations from stakeholders, including governments, to exp around the world.

Partnerships for soft landing

Soft landing is the process of supporting foreign organisations entering or expanding into new markets by introducing the country's business practises, culture and network of relevant stakeholders more effectively.

Choosing the right partners is important in making internationalisation a success. Partnering with individuals and organisations that facilitate local embeddedness and implementation is essential. They assist in the legitimisation of the social enterprise in overcoming so-called liabilities of foreignness as well as origin.

Developing strong local partnership can help SSE organisations to succeed. For instance, since the start Close the Gap (see Box 4) a Belgium-based SSE organisation, has built a strong partnership with a Kenyan non-governmental organisation which enabled its soft landing in a new market.

Box 4. Champion Case: Close the Gap - Belgium Bridging the digital divide

Inequality in access to the internet and digital illiteracy is one of the most important issues in today's world. The digital divide has important consequences including lack of communication, barriers to education, increase in social exclusion, and worsening gender discrimination. Close the Gap aims to close the digital divide in developing countries. This international social enterprise provides pre-owned electronic devices (especially computers) for educational, medical, and social projects. As such, it is a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) non-profit partner for large companies in Europe. It acts as an end-to-end logistics manager and coordinates the supply chain to ensure the successful implementation of IT projects. Close the Gap's main activities are: monitoring and the refurbishment of devices, transportation (export/import), distribution, installation and maintenance, and recycling. Since 2004, it has already supported over 6.000 projects or an equivalent of over 3 million beneficiaries in more than 50 countries.

Since 2017, Close the Gap has set up a new strategy to deepen and broaden its social impact by focusing on supporting innovative entrepreneurship. As a part of this new strategy, the organisation has already run several innovation challenges, called Leap 2, to help young African entrepreneurs to develop and scale digital solutions for social issues. In order to provide more sustainable support to these entrepreneurs Close the Gap has set up a for-profit company and an innovation hub in Kenya.

Close the Gap had a softer landing in Kenya due to the support of a local Kenyan NGO. As this organisation knew the local context and challenges, it served as an intermediary between Close the Gap and its local beneficiaries. Later on, this NGO helped Close the Gap establish a physical presence in Kenya by allowing the social enterprise to set up a plant on its property. For Close the Gap this was the stepping stone towards coordinating the whole supply chain as well as deepening its social impact. This partnership for soft landing illustrates the importance for internationalising SSE organisations to access trusted partners on the ground.

Source: <https://www.close-the-gap.org>



Strategic alliances can safeguard social mission

Creating strategic alliances can help upgrade the standards and ensure that a scaling SSE organisation's social mission is maintained as it internationalises. A good example is Semilla de Dioses (see Box 5), a women's cooperative in Mexico that sees itself as an important enterprise within the agroindustry sector with a strong social and environmental impact in the Yucatan Peninsula. Strengthening the relationship with its clients, based on a good understanding of the quality and credibility of its products, allows them to continue generating quality jobs and collaborating with various national and international institutions. In the future, they will also contribute to creating social economy ecosystems where producers, suppliers and consumers will all benefit.

Box 5. Champion case: Semilla de Dioses - Mexico

Semilla de Dioses dates back to 1996, when María Elide, one of the members of the cooperative, in the need of supporting her children and obtaining immediate income, started selling in Mérida, Yucatán “achiote” (a Mayan condiment) that her mother had taught her to prepare. She began offering the product door-to-door. Later, it expanded its range to other Yucatecan condiments. It was in 2008 that the enterprise run by the women of the family was consolidated into the Semilla de Dioses cooperative.

Nowadays, Semilla de Dioses is a women's cooperative that offers products such as red and black “recado” (another condiment of Mayan origin), spices such as cinnamon and ground pepper, condiments with habanero chili, sweets and snacks - all made with ingredients acquired from local producers. They stand out due to their traditional knowledge, as well as their ability to organise themselves. Their distribution has expanded nationwide through, attending numerous gastronomic fairs and offering workshops in various meetings with Mexican and international chefs to whom they have exposed the culinary traditions of Yucatecan food. Currently, approximately 50 families and 80 women participate and work at Semilla de Dioses. In addition, there are 110 suppliers of raw materials belonging to different states and municipalities as part of their wider production capacity.

They opted for cooperativism as an option for horizontal growth, considering the inclusion of other women in the project where everyone had the same responsibilities and benefits. Having female leadership helps to increase the inclusion of other women since they are prioritised during recruitment processes. Additionally, women are sought in the creation of new partnerships, especially taking into account how to reduce obstacles to their professional inclusion - for example, single women with children benefit from advantages (such as being able to work from home) to become collaborators. Through alliances such as these, they safeguard their social mission.

Source: <https://lacoperacha.org.mx/cooperativa-semilla-de-dioses/>

Cultural heritage can become a unique selling proposition for internationalisation. As demonstrated by the case, Semilla de Dioses recognised the importance of protecting their cultural heritage (André and Pache, 2016) as a strategic part of the internationalisation of their products and services. While they consider it important to partner with governments, they also lean towards finding other organisations with the same profile to them: where rural women are supported, through gastronomy and agroecology, with values and practises of the SSE, promoting fair trade, caring for the environment, and enabling community development to improve people's quality of life. For Semillas de Dioses, it is important to protect the values and principles of the social economy on which they are based and contribute to shaping.

One of the means to internationalise as an SSE organisation is through the creation of local, national and



international alliances that support the strengthening and consolidation of an organisation's activities and mission. International organisations such as the United Nations have invited Semillas de Dioses to several events and training-sessions, allowing them to spread their knowledge through their products and services and create further connections and alliances.

Despite the change of scale in their organisation, they were able to keep the recognition of the indigenous peoples of the region because their culinary tradition was honoured and respected. Traditional Mexican food has been recognized by UNESCO on its Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. At the national level, there is a National Gastronomy Promotion Policy that aims to strengthen the gastronomic value chain, that is, to support, link and train all those who participate in this important activity; as well as the integral promotion and protection of Mexican gastronomy inside and outside the country. In this sense, Semilla de Dioses is innovating with technology to accelerate processes without losing their traditional flavours, respecting the original recipes and manufacturing processes of their products. The internationalisation of Semillas de Dioses has also been achieved through multi-stakeholder partnerships that have enabled a wave of enthusiasm from the general public.

The support needed to unlock potentially global solutions

In this section, the need for supportive structures (services, resources, organisational relationships and enabling communication channels) for internationalising SSE organisations is addressed, with examples from different cases. Most importantly, the needed structures to enable:

- Access to finance and diversification of income stream, such as knowledge and guidance on how to access finance, impact investors and funding from CSR, foundations and international organisations;
- Effective collaboration and stakeholder engagement, like facilitators and intermediary organisations⁴, regional and global networks or matchmaking and open innovation platforms;
- Better conditions for gender equality and internationalisation, such as public policies to ease access to markets, increase revenue streams and reduce inequalities.

Access to finance and diversification of income streams

Reliable financial streams are an important factor for an SSE organisation to consider when deciding to internationalise or not. Despite the diversity of organisations in the SSE, ranging from non-profits to for-profit social organisations, ensuring steady income streams requires structural solutions. SSE organisations tend to have a varied approach to finance, ranging from donations, impact investors, CSR funds, foundations, international organisations, multilateral institutions, and earned revenue. The Better [Entrepreneurship Policy Tool](#) developed by the OECD (Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities - CFE) and the European Commission (DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion) provides specific guidance on access to finance that should be taken into account, such as building capacity for SSE organisations to become more financially self-sustainable and less reliant on public and private grants. Investors can also play a catalytic role in supporting growth into new countries. This has been the case of IKARE Ltd., a UK-based registered charity that supported Shifo Foundation both financially and non-financially from the early days. In Uganda, IKARE funded the pilot to develop the proof of concept of the Smart Paper Technology, while in the Gambia they were part of a consortium that financed the first full-country roll out of the solution offered by Shifo. Finally, they are now supporting Shifo Foundation in expanding their solution to the full scale of primary health services in Zambia.



Key to being successful in internationalising and having both independence and strategic flexibility in doing so, is in generating healthy earned income. SSE organisations that are more reliant on external or philanthropic funding typically find it more difficult to internationalise because of resource constraints. External sources of income are often a form of tied aid, restricting the autonomy and hampering the growth opportunities of the SSE organisation. As a result, the organisation must spend more time, on an ongoing basis, fundraising simply to sustain its operations, let alone having the bandwidth to pursue international growth. Such dependence on finance, which may be in the form of grants won in competitive environments, grants or donations, can limit the organisations' ability to make decisions regarding how and when to scale internationally. Earning its own revenue to, at minimum, cover operations in its home country, can also be a form of proof of concept and furthermore helps an organisation looking to scale build stability at home before extending itself into new contexts that require financial and non-financial resources to assess and adapt. Earned income can also demonstrate market proof as an early indicator in new markets of traction (or not).

Nevertheless, external funding can play an important role while internationalising and should be explored in full by the SSE organisation seeking to scale. If chosen wisely, an impact investor can provide more than just seed funding; some impact investors focus on specific niches/sectors and can provide assistance in terms of the product/service as well as grant access to networks/partners. Catalytic investment for impact can be a useful way of funding the initial phase, providing money, for instance, to ensure proof of concept and patient capital can enable space for good adaptation of a new product/service to a new context. In the case of Close the Gap, a decision was made to search for a private investor to develop their for-profit model. Working with an impact investor provided the company with greater flexibility, more agility and the opportunity to develop a "growth story". The generated profits can be reinvested into the further growth of the model, which in turn, allows the attraction of other external investors in order to scale faster.

It can also be useful to obtain longer term funding from CSR funds, international foundations and corporate organisations, ideally combining financing types and sources. While these external organisations do not often offer financial resources blindly (since they are often motivated by specific local social benefits being addressed in given countries), they can again develop into fully fledged partners rather than just one-off investors. These approaches are described below.

Close the Gap, for example, started as a non-profit partner working on CSR for large companies in the European Union, shipping PC-material to Africa for educational purposes. As such, this social enterprise has been able to set up win-win partnerships with time spans of minimum 5 years. Additionally, the organisation has many strategic partners who not only donate computers, but also support the day-to-day activities of Close the Gap. In the case of the Shifo Foundation, it became clear that to scale their solution internationally they needed the support of large institutional donors, such as the World Bank, Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation and the Global Fund. They first learned about what different financial mechanisms were at their disposal, understanding how they could fit with them. They intent to aim for results-based mechanisms, which would better fit their solution and would ensure them a "sweet funding spot".

WHYFARM's projects are financed by several funding sources of which about 80% are 0% interest lenders, grant funding, prize money and donations; the remaining 20% comes from self-generated revenue (e.g. comic books, workshops, TV advertisement, etc.). Foundations can be important actors for the funding and support of social enterprises. For example, WHYFARM was recognized by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The foundation funded several projects and enabled WHYFARM to develop its international comic books. This kind of support can also help social enterprises secure (international) recognition within the SSE. Nevertheless such grants and donations do not form a steady income stream and do not allow for



recurring income. This is why WHYFARM aims to increase its self-generated revenue to at least 45% of its budget.

It is also important to increase awareness among investors about the variety of models found within the SSE and find ways to connect both. The SSE presents a model of value creation that is different from that of non-socially driven for-profit companies and who in turn require tools capable of enhancing these elements and satisfying the real needs of the world of the SSE.

Effective collaboration and stakeholder engagement

SSE solutions demand a collaborative approach yet multi-stakeholder collaboration can be complex and time-consuming. The definition of the problems to be solved, key stakeholder identification, design of the collaboration approach and the construction of consensus between partners are essential to get right. Since facilitating these requires a specific skill set to shape and guide an effective - and efficient - process of working together, the role of an experienced neutral enabler or facilitator has been identified as a key factor in several successful cases.

Each stakeholder has a particular point of view and interest, often requiring translation of meaning to communicate efficiently in a setting that requires understanding of the social innovation side of SSE internationalisation. Stakeholders may also have a given participation for a short period of time during the initiative and the facilitators need to help to sustain efforts making sure that these transcend in time. The facilitator, upon gaining trust, integrates, translates, supports and evolves efforts.

As an example, the Impact Hub Network acquired the expertise in facilitating multi-stakeholder collaboration and has been a key player in building locally rooted entrepreneurial communities and connecting them globally. Over the past 15 years it has built a global network of impact-driven entrepreneurs, comprising over 100 local communities in 60 countries and 5 continents. Through its hundreds of programs run each year addressing various relevant topics in advancing the SSE, it has been supporting impact-driven entrepreneurs to increase their reach. For example, Accelerate2030, is a program designed in partnership with the UNDP that identifies the most innovative social enterprises (in emerging and developing countries) that are tackling the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and supports them to scale their solutions internationally.

Universities are one example of an entity that could also take on the role of facilitator, not only supporting the internationalising SSE organisation in importing/exporting its innovation but also in leveraging their local and international networks, embeddedness in a local context, subject matter expertise and experience in complementing classroom knowledge with “real world” application. Tecnológico de Monterrey, for example a leading private university in Mexico, is advancing on this approach tackling real challenges as an enabler and convening government, private sector, relevant other organisations and citizens to implement joint efforts like DistritoTec. Similarly, other stakeholders can become facilitators in the SSE.

Enablers for collaboration could also be part of the SSE organisation itself. The cooperative movement, for example, declares in its principles of collaborative governance and cooperation, the interest in developing capacities between its members for mutual support. While other organisations require third-party support to drive collaboration around a goal, cooperatives address collaborative governance and collaborative capacity from the outset.

International collaboration is possible and needed, but it also requires tools to be successful. The EU Horizon 2020 funded Social Challenges Innovation Platform ([see Box 6](#)), for example, demonstrated that it



is possible to summon and gather talent from across Europe to respond with entrepreneurial solutions to societal challenges in various contexts.

Box 6. Champion case: Social Challenges Innovation Platform - EU

Open innovation platform for social and environmental challenges

Developed in 2017-2019 by META, EBN and Impact Hub, it created a market platform in which real social challenges in various contexts could be met with powerful and innovative solutions from innovators in other countries. It provided a space where the work between different actors (public authorities, private companies, third sector organisations, social entrepreneurs and citizens could come together and activate solutions thereby contributing to a more vibrant and collaborative European SSE ecosystem. By providing a tool (a technological platform to showcase and match “problem owners” with “solution providers”) coupled with a methodology to gather, prepare, match and support the collaborative implementation of the solution, the Social Challenges Innovation Platform engaged almost 50 cities and regions in 18 countries posted 83 social challenges that generated almost 500 solutions from 36 countries. Technology and methodologies, with experienced facilitators, can come together to provide platforms to work efficiently and collectively on shared challenges across diverse geographies.

Source: <https://www.socialchallenges.eu>

The collaborative innovation process has different pain points to solve and requires tools. The Collaborative Innovators initiative (GIZ and Impact Hub, n.d.), aims to foster sustainable cooperation that offers win-win situations between startups and the public sector. They developed a robust open-source toolkit for facilitators to prepare and design the process. However, innovating implies implementing and what works into planning does not necessarily work to implementation. This is where the experience of enablers and intermediaries in the SSE who have learned by doing is valuable to such initiatives.

Better conditions for gender equality and internationalisation

The participation of women-led or -operated small businesses or SSE in public procurement processes for the provision of services, goods and works in other countries strengthen their internationalisation capacity.

However, it is important to underline that most procurement happens domestically and cross-border provision of services, goods and works is still limited.

Socially responsible and gender-responsive public procurement (SRPP and GRPP, see Box 7) can be used to advance important strategic objectives such as contributing to achieving and even raising the standards of social and gender equality policy objectives (Verschuur, 2018). They can also contribute to developing another economy that puts people and the environment at the core of its activities.

Box 7. Champion case: Socially responsible public procurement and gender-responsive public procurement (SRPP and GRPP) - EU

The EU and OECD have been promoting socially responsible public procurement (SRPP), which allows achievement of social policy goals through public procurement – the purchase of works, supplies or services by public authorities from third parties. More recently they have started paying attention to gender-responsive public procurement (GRPP),



which is commonly considered part of SRPP.

SRPP can for example help to improve the working conditions of the workforce engaged to deliver the contracts, including alongside the supply chain, and employ women and men with a disadvantaged background for the execution of the contracts.

GRPP is a tool to promote equality between women and men through public procurement. It requires the prior assessment by public buyers of the different needs, interests, priorities and concerns that women and men might have in relation to the services, goods and works to be purchased, which is then reflected in the design of the tendering procedures. This forces economic operators (businesses and SSE organisations) to meet the gender requirements included in the tenders and to deliver contracts in a way that contributes to reducing gender inequalities.

GRPP can help to: balance the number of women or men in the workforce, especially in sectors with under-representation of one of the sexes; address gendered wage inequalities; improve work-life balance and the sharing of care responsibilities between women and men; rebalance teams' composition; better address the situations in which female and male beneficiaries/end-users of the works, goods and services that are purchased have different needs, etc.

Source: European Commission (2021), *Buying Social – A guide to taking account of social considerations in public procurement – Second edition 2021/C 237/01*; European Commission (2019), *Making socially responsible public procurement work - 71 good practice cases*; European Commission (2020), *Buying for social impact - Key findings*; European Commission (2020), *Buying for social impact - Good practice from around the EU*

The design and implementation of SRPP and GRPP processes require a 'cultural shift' that helps redefine the relations between the public sector, civil society and the private sector in advancing the SSE. This cultural shift starts from the public sector and policies that shift the market conditions, thereby obliging the market to deliver contracts in a way that contributes to social and/or gender equality goals.

One way to implement SRPP and GRPP is to increase the participation of SSE and women-led or operated small businesses. SSE organisations are often better placed than ordinary businesses to respond to the social, gender and environmental requirements set by the contracting authorities. At the same time, they often face difficulties in participating in public procurement processes due to the commonly large size of the contracts and complicated regulatory and/or administrative requirements and processes. This is the reason why in the EU and other international legal systems, legislators have foreseen different instruments to improve the participation of small businesses and SSE organisations, including those led or operated by women, such as earmarked participations (reservations) division into lots, set-asides and sole sourcing from women-owned small businesses. The EU and other international legal frameworks address this in various ways. In the EU, Directive 2014/24/EU foresees different tools, such as restricting the participation in tendering procedures to social economy enterprises or organisations alike (so-called reservations⁵), or/and dividing the contract into lots, or by the means of social, gender and environmental considerations.

Governments and public authorities can raise awareness of the role that women have traditionally played in economies and communities, thus becoming amplifiers of their contribution to economic development. The international dimension of GRPP then could involve a critical cultural dimension related to increasing the visibility and legitimisation processes of women as transformational economic agents, in parallel to actually changing the conditions for their participation as such agents for change in their contexts of action.

Public procurement officials may engage in preliminary market consultations, in order to scope out market capacity to deliver social policy and/or gender-responsive outcomes. For example, in contracts related



to Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), reaching out to the widest possible range of contractors – such as including those owned by women – may help to increase women’s participation in STEM. Consultations can be addressed to potential bidders, but they can also include the views and interests of potential users or organisations, such as NGOs working on gender equality, social partners, gender equality bodies, other public sector bodies or experts.

Capacity building can be an effective tool to enhance implementation of policies. It should be noted however that the evidence regarding the efficacy of set-asides in supporting gender equality shows that policies are unlikely to work in the absence of broader capacity-building for women-owned businesses in relevant sectors to participate in public tenders.

‘Women principles’ are applicable to SSE organisations’ internationalisation process

The recognition of women principles

The initial framing of the objectives of our PLP started with a focus on the key barriers and enablers for women within the SSE and how those could be addressed and supported respectively. Considering extensive existing research that has the same or similar focus (RIPESS, n.d.; Halabisky, 2018; Py and Barthélemy, 2019; OECD, 2021), the PLP decided to take a different approach to zoom out and reframe the question, this time posing women as agents within the SSE. The decision was to investigate within the champion cases, how inherent values and principles in women-based and/or led SSE organisations can be brought into SSE to strengthen its internationalisation processes.

Box 8. Champion case: SHEROES - India

Women-only community platform offering support, resources and opportunities.

Launched in 2014, mainly as a careers’ community for women, the initial traction of 250K users (in the pre-WhatsApp era), was from women internet users mostly from metropolitan cities in India. By 2016, the platform had 20K companies seeking potential employees and became the 3rd largest job portal. With the advent of low-cost mobile data plans in India, and as smartphone prices went down, more women from non-metropolitan cities began to access various online services. With this change in user profile, Sheroes pivoted into a social network for women and launched its app. Over the years, SHEROES has invested heavily in its brand and community and has now built a digital ecosystem for women, with community at the heart of it. It has come to be known as the Women’s Internet – a safe, high-trust and constructive online ecosystem for women, that serves the universal interests of women and helps reduce the gender gap at scale. Although based in India, SHEROES services women across 123 countries, including the USA, the UK, Middle East and Singapore.

Source: <https://sheroes.com>

While Sheroes and Semillas de Dioses gives a perspective of which are the principles and values brought into play by female-led social enterprises, SRPP and GRPP show us a way in which those principles can be fostered and scaled in the general economy via public procurement.

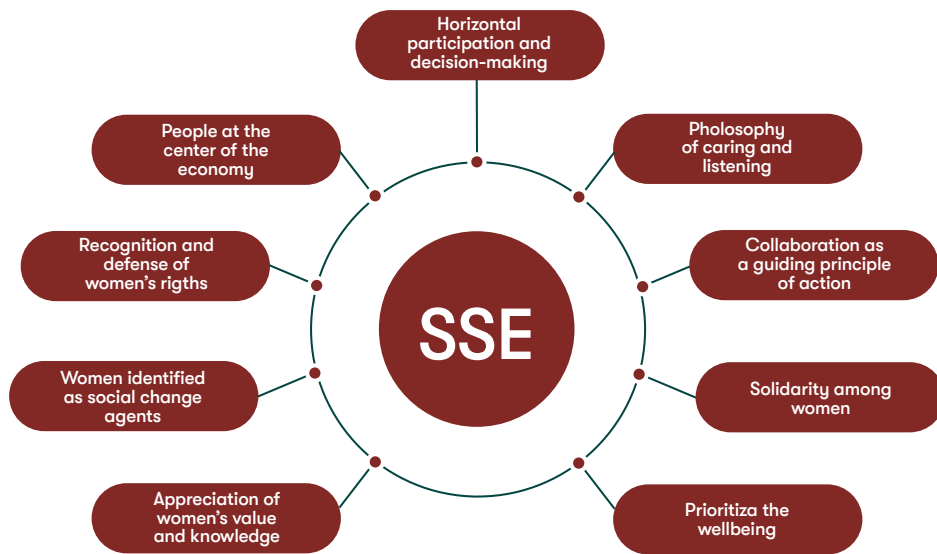
Ten main ‘women principles’ became obvious from the social enterprises studied with respect to this view,



which emphasised the social and ecological justice that SSE embodies (see figure 1). Female-led social enterprises, as investigated in these cases, can strengthen the sector by fostering the values of collaboration, wellbeing, horizontal decision-making, and of a sense of listening and care for others, for the planet and for core values that drive impact. The cases investigated also showed that female-led SSEs tend to put women and the aim for gender equality at the centre of the organisation, supporting other women to break barriers and advance socially and economically. They also play a role in challenging gender norms and changing perspectives about women’s roles, which are also strengthening factors both for the organisation and the SSE as a whole. These ten principles should be fostered by the SSEs themselves beyond reliance that they come from female leadership. These are principles that should spill over across all leadership in the sector and be incentivised by stakeholders working to support the further development of the SSE, including investors and policy makers.

Figure 1. Main female principles

Principles identified by the consortium within women-led social enterprises with potential positive spill-over effects over the wider SSE.



1. Horizontal participation and decision-making: Horizontal participation has two components; first, it should stimulate social contact between people from various sections of society, and those living in varied communities; second, it should enable social cohesion and social inclusion. Sheroes does exactly this through its platform by creating multiple virtual communities with a cross-section of people across geographies participating in them, and thus enables social cohesion/ inclusion.

2. Philosophy of caring and listening: Some of the communities that SHEROES enables are Health, Career & Education, Parenting/Babycare, Love Sex & Relationships, and more. In these communities, women engage with each other and provide support to each other by sharing their experiences. Fundamentally, this is about caring and listening to each other.

3. Collaboration as a guiding principle of action: Collaboration is the bedrock on which SHEROES operates, as it brings together various stakeholders together on their platform – be it buyers/sellers, entrepreneurs and mentors, fund seekers and fund providers, and more.

4. Solidarity among women: It is very important in a region where inequality is very high; mutual help with other female



heads of household helped women feel more confident. Women in situations of violence are also supported, empowering them economically and psychologically in order to provide them with new alternatives for their survival and that of their children and promoting their autonomy. Likewise, self-support groups have been created for women who live in similar situations, where they share their problems and find solutions.

5. Prioritize the wellbeing: Through Semilla de Dioses cooperative, jobs are generated that mainly benefit women, changing their lives from a cooperative vision. They change their priorities, including focus on their wellbeing, on their good nutrition, derived from the knowledge they have of it, their characteristics and origin.

6. Appreciation for their value and their knowledge: The community needs to recognize the value of women's traditional knowledge and of women themselves. Women from Semilla de Dioses don't want to sell the recipes themselves, but they share the knowledge with other women in the community on how to replicate them. They want to generate more work and income to women, as well as promote sharing of their heritage. The teaching process of the importance of the heritage takes precedence over a one-off sell to any chefs.

7. Women identified as social change agents: Semilla de Dioses changed the traditional perspective because of the value they were able to bring related to care in the harvesting process. At the beginning, men farmers did not want to deal with them. But now, there is a cultural change in the region, most of the suppliers are women, the jobs that are generated around the activity of Semilla de Dioses are women. By becoming farmers, women have succeeded in changing the gendered perception of the inhabitants and thus in abolishing discrimination in employment in this field. Furthermore, having role models in a field tends to help young girls to know that this possibility exists, it allows for a long-term increase in the presence of women in agriculture and thus a decrease in gender divisions regarding employment.

8. Recognition and defense of women's rights: At first, Semilla de Dioses leaders had some setbacks due to gender bias, since the field providers thought that because they were women they did not know how to differentiate between the seeds. However, they have shown that knowledge, as well as the ability to organise and work as no longer a difference between men and women.

9. People at the centre of the economy: It is clear in Semilla de Dioses that the most important thing is the well being of the people, so their members always come first and then their earnings.

A feminist plan for sustainability and social justice

The project's findings were further strengthened by the recent UN Women feminist plan. The plan for economic recovery and transformation (UN Women, 2021), provides learnings from the COVID-19 pandemic and earlier crises. The document elucidates the growing need and call to action for better policy and investment in the SSE, with a focus on empowering women.

UN Women is calling for improved policy, action and investment to address and break the vicious cycle of economic insecurity, environmental destruction and exclusionary politics so to shape a better, more gender-equal and sustainable world, including:

- Investing in the care economy and social infrastructure;
- Harnessing the potential of the transition to environmental sustainability;
- Promoting women's leadership across institutional spaces;
- Increasing funding for women's organisations.

The vision in this document and its proposals should inspire and drive developments within the SSE as a whole, including its internationalisation. The key levers, strategies and concrete proposals should not be considered as simple 'measures for women' but rather as urgent actions to nurture a healthier economy and society as a whole; making human and just economies that allow for the recovery and wellbeing of



communities and the planet. A recurring message is particularly useful: the need for new paradigms and partnerships that do not prioritise the interests of corporations and shareholders but rather that reduce the unhealthy dependencies of communities. Well-supported research is key, particularly taking into account the needs and perspectives of communities and involving them into the process. Locally embedded action, agents' participation and international enabling coordination (via the revision of legal schemes and rules by states and "coalitions for change" by citizens, for instance) seem to be some of the unavoidable ingredients for this SSE to which we wish to contribute and to which feminist principles can highly contribute.

CHAPTER 3

Conclusions



OECD
Global Action

Promoting
Social & Solidarity
Economy Ecosystems





The PLP identified various elements that emerged from its studies and deliberations that are important for the strengthening of the internationalisation process of SSE organisations. It is the PLP's intention that these findings, principles and practices support SSE organisations seeking to internationalise as well as those that have the position and capacity to create better enabling conditions for internationalisation, with specific attention to the role of women in this process. These elements can be consolidated into 3 key areas for attention:

Building compelling narratives

The development of compelling and strong narratives around the story, purpose and model of an internationalising SSE organisation has multiple benefits including inspiration and identification of partners. First, it can be a source of inspiration to others in the SSE to seek similar paths; second, it helps to position that particular SSE organisation in the market as experts in the type of work they develop; and finally, strong narratives play an important role when seeking investments and partnerships that can allow SSE organisations to find necessary financial resources to internationalise and scale their solutions.

For it to be successful and support the internationalisation process, the narrative, following the business or operating model of the SSE, needs to take into account local needs and challenges and always be subject to revision and adaptations. Whereas seeing your solution as a potential global challenge solver, in order to create relevant and applicable solutions to different contexts, it is mandatory to be flexible and understand local needs. The process of internationalisation demands a global mindset with a local attitude. The narrative, therefore, must be tailored locally to respond to local challenges in the same way that the SSE organisation might need to adapt its business or operating model.

Enhance of the role of enablers

Acting in different capacities, enablers can collaborate on access to knowledge (e.g. universities and hubs), they can provide business support such as coaching and mentoring (e.g. entrepreneurship support organisations), they can provide access to markets (e.g. public procurement), or access to local beneficiaries (e.g. local partners, networks and stakeholders as seen on the Close the Gap case).

It is worth highlighting the key role of enabling access to finance. As SSE organisations often are started because of their social mission, there are common needs to strengthen their “market sense”, and for those seeking to internationalise to reach financial autonomy and investment readiness if that is what they need. On the other hand, fund providers and investors need to better understand the specificities of the SSE and needs of its diverse players and their (legal) setups when it comes to financing; the risk perception of SSE needs to be reduced while administrative and regulatory processes simplified. This implies the need to develop appropriate skills to build sustainable (and scalable) business models and attract investment. Many social enterprises depend on so-called “boot-strapping” techniques, often finding it difficult to scale-up. Increased access to finance coupled with appropriate capacity-building can help resolve some of these bottlenecks and make sure that social enterprises can realise their full potential.

As described in the earlier sections on need for level of flexibility and adaptation to local context, Networking to overcome complex institutional contexts and Soft landing, local embeddedness and implementation is essential, and establishing strong partnerships with local enablers assists in the legitimisation of the SSE organisation in overcoming so-called liabilities of foreignness as well as origin. Such partners can also help the SSE organisation keep the mission at the center of the internationalisation



process, always taking into account the local contextualisation of the scaled solution.

Recognise and foster female leadership principles

The first two KLOs have investigated pathways for internationalisation, which described success factors that could also be applied to female-led social enterprises and the improvement of conditions for all women within the SSE. Interestingly, the key factors highlighted from the selected cases show that successful internationalisation processes take into account approaches that are strongly present in female-led initiatives such as the SHEROES and Semillas de Dioses cases.

By observing female principles and providing the right opportunities for female-led organisations to develop and grow, one can focus on bringing the identified key principles to the forefront of the general SSE thus strengthening the ecosystem and potentially facilitating internationalisation processes.

For example, female leadership characteristics observed in the cases such as collaboration, culture of listening, bottom-up approach and flexibility, can help in building successful local partnerships, adapting solutions to local needs and establishing relevant narratives that can inspire others and open new opportunities for the internationalisation process.

Moreover, following the report “Beyond COVID-19: A feminist plan for sustainability and social justice” (UN Women, 2021), there is an urge to involve women and communities in the policymaking and decision-making process to overcome the current crises affecting society and the planet (eco-social crises). The SSE is definitely one pathway towards that direction, and women bring to the forefront strong principles that enhance the empowerment of underrepresented groups and communities, and being 50% of the global population, catering to their needs would already contribute to the wellbeing of communities.

Women tend to bring solidarity with other women to the core of their organisations, as well as the wellbeing of other women and their communities (Verschuur and Calvão, 2018). Ultimately, by strengthening women within SSE (Verschuur, 2018), we can advance gender equality and the rights of women and girls, contributing to the development of communities as a whole.

Annex A.

Consortium partners



OECD
Global Action

Promoting
Social & Solidarity
Economy Ecosystems




Table 2. List of organisations involved in the PLP consortia and events

| Organisation | Country | Country | Country |
|---|-------------|---------------|---------------------------------------|
| Amsterdam Impact | Netherlands | Government | Ellen Oetelmans Egon Van Wees |
| Aspire Impact | India | Practitioners | Amit Bhatia Arvind Sridharan |
| Centre for Social Innovation | Canada | Practitioners | Tonya Surman |
| Centro CEMEX-TEC | Mexico | Practitioners | Mariana Zamudio |
| City of Austin | USA | Government | Chris Schreck |
| Cooperative Alliance (COOP) | Belgium | Practitioners | Agn s Mathis Heleen Heysse |
| DistritoTec | Mexico | Academia | Lorena Vianey Pulido Ramírez |
| EMES Research Network | Belgium | Practitioners | Rocio Nogales |
| Joint Research Centre (JRC) | Italy | Academia | Alessandro Rancati |
| European Association for Local Development (AEIDL) | Belgium | Practitioners | Valentina Caimi |
| European Business and Innovation Centre Network (EBN) | Belgium | Practitioners | Amal El Ghadfa |
| European Venture Philanthropy Association (EVPA) | Belgium | Practitioners | Ewa Konczal Gianluca Gaggiotti |
| GIZ/BMZ | Germany | Government | Christian Gmelin |
| Groupe SOS | France | Practitioners | Pénélope Silice Anna Lanfranchi |
| Instituto Nacional de la Economía Social (INAES) | Mexico | Government | Mariana Heredia Mariana Negrete |
| Italian Forum for the Third Sector | Italy | Government | Francesco Gentili Patrizia Bertoni |
| KU Leuven | Belgium | Academia | Filip De Beule Elisa Dries |
| São Paulo State Government | Brazil | Government | Arnaldo da Silva Júnior |

Annex B.

Cases Database



OECD
Global Action

Promoting
Social & Solidarity
Economy Ecosystems





| CASE TITLE | GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION |
|---|--|
| Abalobi | Sub-Saharan Africa |
| Brazilian Craft Women Cooperatives | Latin America and the Caribbean |
| Center helping women entrepreneurs / start-ups (coop): Weibberwirtschaft | Western Europe |
| Clínicas del Azúcar | Latin America and the Caribbean |
| coop4edu | Eastern Europe; Northern Europe; Southern Europe; Western Europe |
| Coopedia | Global / No specific location; Eastern Europe; Northern Europe; Southern Europe; Western Europe |
| COOPS & SDGs SDG 5: Gender equality and women & girls empowerment | Global / No specific location |
| Close the Gap | Global / No specific location |
| Gender Equality Charter | Eastern Europe; Northern Europe; Southern Europe; Western Europe |
| Gender responsive public procurement as a tool to promote internationalisation of women's led/cooperated SSEs | Latin America and the Caribbean; Northern America; Western Asia / Middle East |
| Generation Equality: SOS GROUP for Women in tech | Global / No specific location; Northern Africa; Sub-Saharan Africa; Eastern Europe; Northern Europe; Southern Europe; Western Europe |
| Global girl project | Sub-Saharan Africa |
| Hippo roller | Sub-Saharan Africa |
| Impact Transfer by Ashoka | Global / No specific location |
| Internationalization case of Dialogue through licensing and franchising | Global / No specific location |
| Le Mat | Western Europe |
| Livestock Wealth | Sub-Saharan Africa |
| Mahila Housing Sewa Trust | South-Eastern Asia |
| Mind our business: Amplify the transformative power of sustainable and inclusive business models through EU external action". | Global / No specific location; Eastern Europe; Northern Europe; Southern Europe; Western Europe |
| Mother to mother | Sub-Saharan Africa |
| MUBAR: mujeres de barro negro | Latin America and the Caribbean |
| NewMotion | Northern Europe; Western Europe |
| PlacemakingX | Global / No specific location |
| RESCoop Cooperatives Europe | EU |
| Riders for Health | Sub-Saharan Africa |
| Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) | Southern Asia |
| Semillas de dioses: cooperativa con sabor a Yucatán | Latin America and the Caribbean |
| SHEROES - Communities for Women | India / Southern Asia |



| CASE TITLE | GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION |
|---|--|
| Shifo Foundation | Sub-Sharan Africa;Latin America and the Caribbean;Central Asia |
| Simplon.co | Northern Africa;Sub-Sharan Africa;Central Asia;Eastern Europe;Southern Europe;Western Europe |
| Sistema-B | Latin America and the Caribbean;Northern America |
| SMart - Freelancers cooperative | Northern Europe;Southern Europe;Western Europe |
| SocialChallenges.eu | Western Europe |
| Soft landing programme | Northern Europe |
| SOS GROUP going international | Global / No specific location |
| Strengthening Refugee-Led Organizations of Women in Uganda | Sub-Sharan Africa |
| Transforming our world: A cooperative 2030 | Global / No specific location |
| TRANSITION project -Transnational Startup Lab | Western Europe |
| Unicus | Northern Europe |
| Vicasol – acgricultural Cooperative from Almeria with gender equality agenda. | Western Europe |
| WHYFARM | Latin America and the Caribbean |
| Women empowerment through collective action: the story of Toudarté | Northern Africa |
| WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP: achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 world | Global / No specific location |

References



OECD
Global Action

Promoting
Social & Solidarity
Economy Ecosystems





André, K. and Pache, A.-C. (2016) “From Caring Entrepreneur to Caring Enterprise: Addressing the Ethical Challenges of Scaling up Social Enterprises,” *Journal of Business Ethics*, 133(4), pp. 659–675. doi:10.1007/s10551-014-2445-8.

Bachmann, M. (2013) “How the Hub Found Its Center,” *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 12(1), pp. 23–27. doi:10.48558/DEJ9-6608.

Baker, W. and Faulkner, R.R. (2009) “Social Capital, Double Embeddedness, and Mechanisms of Stability and Change,” *American Behavioral Scientist*, 52(11), pp. 1531–1555. doi:10.1177/0002764209331525.

Borzaga, C., Salvatori, G. and Bodini, R. (2017) *Social and Solidarity Economy and the Future of Work*. Geneva.

ColaLife (no date) *ColaLife - Globalizer Knowledge Base*, <https://www.colalife.org/globalizer/>. Available at: <https://www.colalife.org/globalizer/> (Accessed: November 30, 2022).

Collaborative Innovators (no date) *Collaborative Innovators*, <https://collaborative-innovators.org/>. Available at: <https://collaborative-innovators.org/> (Accessed: November 30, 2021).

Halabisky, D. (2018) *Policy Brief on Women’s Entrepreneurship*. Paris.

Heintz, J., Staab, S. and Turquet, L. (2021) “Don’t Let Another Crisis Go to Waste: The COVID-19 Pandemic and the Imperative for a Paradigm shift,” *Feminist Economics*, 27(1–2), pp. 470–485. doi:10.1080/13545701.2020.1867762.

van Lunenburg, M., Geuijen, K. and Meijer, A. (2020) “How and Why Do Social and Sustainable Initiatives Scale? A Systematic Review of the Literature on Social Entrepreneurship and Grassroots Innovation,” *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 31(5), pp. 1013–1024. doi:10.1007/s11266-020-00208-7.

van der Meulen, B., Nedeva, M. and Braun, D. (2005) “Intermediaries Organisation and Processes: theory and research issues.”

Miller, E. (2010) “Solidarity Economy: Key Concepts and Issues,” in.

Muñoz, P. and Kibler, E. (2016) “Institutional complexity and social entrepreneurship: A fuzzy-set approach,” *Journal of Business Research*, 69(4), pp. 1314–1318. doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2015.10.098.

Neessen, P.C.M., Voinea, C.L. and Dobber, E. (2021) “Business Models of Social Enterprises: Insight into Key Components and Value Creation,” *Sustainability*, 13(22), p. 12750. doi:10.3390/su132212750.

OECD (2020) *Social economy and the COVID-19 crisis: current and future roles*, <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/social-economy-and-the-covid-19-crisis-current-and-future-roles-f904b89f/#section-d1e124>.

OECD (2021a) *Entrepreneurship Policies through the Gender Lens*. OECD. doi:10.1787/71c8f9c9-en.

OECD (2021b) *Social impact measurement for the Social and Solidarity Economy: OECD Global Action Promoting Social & Solidarity Economy Ecosystems*. Paris.



OECD (no date) *OECD Policy Responses to Coronavirus (COVID-19)*. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1787/5b0fd8cd-en>.

Py, J. and Barthélemy, S. (2019) *WOMEN-LED SOCIAL ENTERPRISES A EUROPEAN STUDY SUPPORTED BY THE PRAIRIAL FOUNDATION*. Paris.

RIPESS (no date) *Women & SSE*, <http://www.ripess.org/working-areas/women-sse/?lang=en>. Available at: <http://www.ripess.org/working-areas/women-sse/?lang=en> (Accessed: November 30, 2021).

UN Women (2021) *Beyond COVID-19: A feminist plan for sustainability and social justice*.

Verschuur, C. (2018) *Making public policies for SSE sustainable, feminist-conscious and transformative: exploring the challenges*. Geneva.

Verschuur, C. and Calvo, F. (2018) *Solidarity practices and the formation of political subjects and actions for change*. Geneva.

Footnotes



OECD
Global Action

Promoting
Social & Solidarity
Economy Ecosystems





OECD

Global Action

Promoting
Social & Solidarity
Economy Ecosystems

¹ Internationalisation, considers the process of an entity acquiring presence and active participation in other countries by itself or through strategic partners in order to create social value for its beneficiaries.

² According to a publication from the London Business School, which analyses born global companies, or international new ventures (INVs), those can be identified by their use of resources and the sale of outputs in multiple countries since their inception as a business in opposition to multinational that are born local and grow to scale to international markets. Source: <https://www.london.edu/think/born-global>

³ Proof of concept (PoC) is a process that evaluates if a concept (product, idea, design) is feasible and has the potential for real-world application. It is usually required by investors, managers, or stakeholders, who need tangible proof that resources expended can drive the expected return.

⁴ At the most general level, intermediary organisations are defined by their structural position, namely ‘intermediary’ is any organisation that mediates the relationship(s) between two or more social actors (organisations, institutions, etc.) (van der Meulen, Nedeva and Braun, 2005)

⁵ There are two types of reservations: the first type is the possibility to restrict competition to economic operators whose main mission is the social and professional integration of disadvantaged workers and workers with disabilities (e.g. social enterprises / social economy enterprises), the so-called ‘reserved contracts for work integration’, which can be used for purchasing any supplies, services or works; the second type is the possibility to restrict tendering procedures for social, health, education and cultural services only to organisations which have a public service mission and which meet specified conditions regarding their governance. The participation in public procurement processes by SSE organisations strengthens their growth, too. When SSE organisations are able to participate in tendering procedures, they have the possibility to increase their market opportunities, increase and diversify the portfolio of their clients, collaborate with businesses or other SSE organisations in consortia or as sub-contractors, enhance their reputation and accountability towards the public sector.



OECD
Global Action

Promoting
Social & Solidarity
Economy Ecosystems



SOCIAL SOLIDARITY ECONOMY

A people centred
approach to
internationalisation
with feminist principles
taking centre stage.

© OECD 2022