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Information Note on the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Social and Solidarity Economy

by UNRISD

Social and Solidarity Economy

1. The **UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Social and Solidarity Economy (TFSSE)** was established to raise the visibility of the social and solidarity economy (SSE) in international knowledge and policy circles as it holds considerable promises for addressing the economic, social and environmental integrated approaches of sustainable development.
2. It is a high-level initiative that recognizes the growing interest within the development sector in SSE, which includes organizations such as cooperatives, women's self-help groups, social enterprises and associations of informal workers. SSE organizations have explicit social and economic objectives and involve various forms of cooperation and solidarity. Globally, these alternative forms of production, finance and consumption are growing in response to the social, economic and environmental crises. Many national and local governments are now responding to this significant trend as they recognize the development potential of SSE.
3. Referring to the recently adopted **2030 Agenda for sustainable development**, the social and solidarity economy, in the multiplicity of its forms around the world, is one of the strategic transformative approaches needed for the integrated implementation of the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**.

Origins and functioning of the TFSSE

4. The United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force is a result of the **conference on the Potential and Limits of Social and Solidarity Economy** organized in May 2013 by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), co-hosted with the International Labour Office (ILO) and in collaboration with the UN Non-Governmental Liaison Service (UN-NGLS). The founding meeting of the TFSSE took place on 30 September 2013 in Geneva. The meeting was convened by ILO, UNDP, UN-NGLS and UNRISD, and attended by 14 agencies.

5. The Task Force now counts **nineteen UN Agencies and other inter-governmental organizations** as members¹, as well as **seven civil society organizations or umbrella associations of SSE networks** as observers². The TFSSE meetings are physically organized every two months in Geneva (Switzerland) with possibilities for people to connect through teleconference or video conference. In between the TFSSE meetings, bilateral meetings and working group meetings are organized to work on specific topics or activities.

6. The Task Force has a rotating secretariat. UNRISD hosted the secretariat for the first year of existence of the Task Force. The ILO housed it for its second year. The secretariat is currently hosted by the FAO, in its Liaison Office in Geneva. Decisions are taken by consensus during meetings. Organizations with observer status are invited to participate actively in the discussions and debates.

Goal of the TFSSE

7. The TFSSE aims to raise the visibility of debates about SSE within the UN system and beyond. The members and observers of the Task Force have committed to undertake collaborative activities to:

- enhance the recognition of the role of SSE enterprises and organizations in sustainable development;
- promote knowledge of SSE and consolidate SSE networks;
- support the establishment of an enabling institutional and policy environment for SSE; and
- ensure coordination of international efforts, and create and strengthen partnerships for SSE.

Activities of the TFSSE

8. The work of the Task Force takes the form of joint initiatives among members: producing reports and briefs, organizing events related to SSE in connection with relevant UN processes and conferences, and creating partnerships and dialogues with governmental and civil society entities. (Examples in Annex).

9. The TFSSE publishes documents jointly written by its members and observers. The first Task Force position paper argues that the post-2015 development agenda should pay more attention to the potential of social and solidarity economy (SSE). The position paper illustrates the potential by examining the role of SSE in selected issue areas that, the Task Force believes, are central to the challenge of socially sustainable development in the 21st century. The TFSSE is currently working on a position paper that brings forward the role of SSE in the implementation and the realization of the SDGs.

10. The website of the TFSSE (<http://unsse.org/>) serves as a library for all publications of UN agencies that tackle SSE related issues. This provides an easy access to information on what the UN is doing in connection with SSE.

¹ Members : DESA, ECLAC, ESCWA, FAO, ILO, TDR, UN Women, UNAIDS, UNCTAD , UNDP, UNECE, UNEP, UNESCO, UNIDO, UN-NGLS, UNRISD, WFP, WHO and OECD

² Observers : International Cooperative Alliance, Mont Blanc Meetings, MedESS, RIPPSS, EMES, EESC, GSEF

Future of the TFSSE

11. After more than two years of existence, the TFSSE has now come to a turning point, where the members and observers aspire to bring the collaboration and the activities to the next level. The recently adopted 2030 Agenda and the SDGs with its inclusive approach provide an excellent framework for boosting the work on SSE. The potential capacity of SSE to support the implementation of the SDGs as a crosscutting transformational vision has strengthened the ambition of the TFSSE to formalize the way of working and to increase the joint activities.

12. For 2016-2017, the TFSSE plans to increase the visibility of SSE and explore possibilities for further collaboration between the different agencies to jointly champion SSE by working towards a high level event where the topic could be brought forward and promoted. The priority areas of action for 2016-2017 are:

- Research on the potential tools and indicators to measure the impact of SSE
- Advocacy to increase the visibility of SSE
- Capacity development through the development of country guidelines on SSE
- Partnership at the inter-agency level as well as partnerships with countries, the civil-society and other international bodies dealing with SSE:
- Joint activities at the country level

13. The 2016-2017 work plan will be elaborated during a retreat in March 2016. The TFSSE will also work on the development of a joint programme bringing forward the added value of inter-agency programming to support SSE.

14. The TFSSE has also engaged in exchanges with the European Commission (DG Growth and DG DEVCO) around SSE and the possible collaboration between the European Commission and the TFSSE. The European Commission could, among others, be a possible technical and financial partner in the future for the activities of the joint programme mentioned above.

Specific activities of the TFSSE and SSE within the different UN Agencies

The following is an overview of some events attended or organized by TFSSE members and observers:

- First European forum on Social and Solidarity Economy at the European Parliament, 28 January 2016, Brussels
- High Level Event of the Leading Group on Social and Solidarity Event hosted by French President François Hollande, 28 September 2015, New York, (including technical guidance in drafting the joint declaration adopted at the meeting: “Towards Public Policies Supporting the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) for Sustainable Development”).
- Fifth edition of the Social and Solidarity Economy Academy, 27-31 July 2015, Johannesburg
- Side-event in Addis Ababa on Financing for Development, 13 July 2015, Addis Ababa
- TFSSE session at the Global Social Economy Forum, 17-19 November 2014, Seoul
- Breakout session on “How Can Financial Institutions Support Actors in the Social Solidarity Economy?” organized in collaboration with the World Bank and Regional Development Banks during the 11th Annual Meeting of United Nations and International Organizations Civil Society Focal Points, 17-18 November 2014, Washington D.C.
- TFSSE side-event at the 41st session of the Committee on World Food Security, 17 October 2014, Rome.
- Conference of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) on “Social economy and social innovation as drivers of competitiveness, growth and social well-being“, 1 October 2014, Brussels.
- First meeting of the Leading Group on SSE, General Assembly, 22 September 2014, NY.
- Breakout session on “Alternative trade and finance for a solidarity economy” during the fifth UNCTAD Public Symposium – A better world economic order for equality and sustainable development post-2015, 18-19 June 2014, Geneva.
- Side event on SSE at the 8th session of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development, 4 February 2014, NY.

Social and Solidarity Economy within the different UN Agencies

The **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)** promotes the achievement of sustainable food security and rural poverty reduction. In doing so, FAO applies integrated approaches to making food systems more efficient and inclusive, enhancing rural livelihoods and managing natural resources in a sustainable manner. These approaches are congruent with the values of SSE, as FAO promotes: local agricultural and rural development and inclusive food systems; social and gender equality; provisioning of social services and social protection accessible to all; social entrepreneurship; building resilience for rural communities; sustainable use of land and natural resources; inclusive access to finance for farmers and rural populations; and decent rural employment. FAO acknowledges the crucial role of inclusive and efficient cooperatives and producer organizations.

The **International Labour Organization (ILO)**'s commitment to the advancement of the social economy. The ILO, through its Cooperatives Unit (COOP), has undertaken considerable work at regional and global levels in the field of cooperatives and SSE as a whole. Since 2010, the ILO has held several Academies on SSE, bringing together academics, practitioners and constituents to discuss the subject. As part of the Academy, an online course on SSE has been developed, as well as the "Collective Brain", a virtual interactive space aiming to enrich the ILO Academy on Social and Solidarity Economy. In addition, the South-South and Triangular Cooperation "Meeting Point" exist. The ILO also aims, through the ILO Social Finance Unit, to improve access to finance through the promotion of social economy organizations such as microfinance and micro-insurance schemes.

The **United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)** promotes social entrepreneurship and impact investment as part of its work on investment and enterprise development. It defines social entrepreneurship as combining financial sustainability and the generation of economic returns to investment with the goal of serving the community, reducing inequality or enhancing social cohesion, as well as the pursuit of environmental sustainability goals. UNCTAD provides policy advice to governments willing to adopt an entrepreneurship or an investment strategy and to prioritize social development goals in that context. It has also developed specific training packages to train social entrepreneurs and upgrade their entrepreneurial skills, as well as to help them better deal with the challenges of hybrid (for profit/non-profit) business models.

The **United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA)** works closely with governments and stakeholders to help countries around the world meet their economic, social and environmental goals. The Division for Social Policy and Development (DSPD) of UNDESA is the UN's focal point on cooperatives, responsible for the promotion of cooperatives in development at the national and international levels and providing analysis and policy advice to governments and intergovernmental bodies of the UN. DSPD works collaboratively with the Committee for the Promotion and Advancement of Cooperatives (COPAC). DSPD also organizes expert group meetings (EGMs), conducts special studies on issues related to growth and development of cooperatives, and conducts capacity building activities to strengthen the work of governments and cooperatives.

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** is interested in the promotion of SSE through local economic development, gender equality, social service provisioning, public policy law, social entrepreneurship, environmental protection/climate change, food security, sustainable cities and South-South Cooperation. Through extensive country presence and focus on inclusive growth and vulnerable groups, UNDP is well positioned to support broad partnership in favor of SSE. Several regional and national programmes of UNDP have included the promotion of SSE, notable in Eastern Europe/Central Asia and in Central/Latin America. Among others, UNDP connects SSE to local economic development and believes SSE can play a role in the recently designed Local Governance Strategy. SSE can also be found under UNDP's Strategy on Civil Society and Civic Engagement including for the promotion of an enabling environment for the engagement of civil society in the fight against poverty and social exclusion.

The **United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service (UN-NGLS)** initiated its work on SSE after the People's Summit at the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in 2012, where social movements were advocating for the integration of SSE in the UN's sustainable development agenda. UN-NGLS supports this effort by: facilitating the engagement of SSE civil society actors in UN processes as part of its mandate to promote the voices of under-represented segments of civil society, fostering multi-stakeholder partnerships to help scale up SSE initiatives and promoting SSE in its publications and communications outreach products.

The **United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD)** launched its ongoing SSE research project in 2012. Together with the ILO and UN-NGLS, UNRISD organized the first UN Conference on SSE in May 2013, which led to the creation of the TFSSE. Through in-house research, and partnerships with scholars, research organizations, SSE networks and other UN agencies, UNRISD explored the conditions and contexts that enable SSE to expand, as well as the contradictions and constraints to assess the implications of such processes and interactions with external actors and institutions for realizing the potential of SSE as a distinctive approach to development. UNRISD is currently developing a research project to assess the impact of SSE while considering the larger political and economic space they exist and operate within. From a policy perspective, UNRISD's inquiry aims to give more visibility to SSE in UN policy debates and to provide the necessary evidence to prove the impact of SSE.
