



# UNRISD

UNITED NATIONS RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

## Call for Papers and Symposium Potential and Limits of Social and Solidarity Economy

In a context of heightened human and environmental insecurity linked to multiple global crises and market pressures, and as the international development community considers a post-2015 development agenda, UNRISD research is focusing on “alternative” development policy and strategy.

One strand of this inquiry concerns advocacy, policy and practice related to “social and solidarity economy”. Through this Call for Papers, UNRISD invites researchers to submit proposals for papers that critically examine the scope for expanding SSE, and its potential and limits as a distinctive approach to development.

Key themes include:

- Conceptualizing, measuring and appraising SSE
- Expanding SSE through market relations
- Enabling SSE through public policy and the state
- Social movements, networks and the politics of change

Selected papers will be presented at an international symposium to be held at the United Nations in Geneva in May 2013.

### Background and Context

Multiple global crises (food, finance/economic, energy/climate) and heightened concerns about the social, environmental and developmental consequences of market- and corporate-led development have reignited interest in “alternative” production and consumption patterns and ways of organizing enterprise activities. Considerable attention is currently focusing on social and solidarity economy (SSE)<sup>1</sup>, the term increasingly used to refer to forms of production and exchange that aim to satisfy human needs, build resilience and expand human capabilities through social relations based on varying degrees of cooperation, association and solidarity. Other values and objectives such as democratic/participatory decision making, social and environmental justice, social cohesion and non-violence are also often prominent features of SSE.<sup>2</sup> Forms of SSE with the above characteristics may interact with but are distinct from state-owned enterprises or public service provisioning and conventional for-profit private enterprise. Aspects associated with collective organization and solidarity may also distinguish SSE organizations from individual, unorganized, own-account (“informal”) workers, or micro- or small enterprises.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, José Luis Coraggio, 2011, *Economía Social y Solidaria*; Bénédicte Fonteneau et al. 2010, *Social and Solidarity Economy: Building a Common Understanding*; Bénédicte Fonteneau et al. 2011, *Social and Solidarity Economy: Our Common Road towards Decent Work*.

<sup>2</sup> See also, Bina Agarwal, 2010, *Gender and Green Governance*; Ash Amin, 2009, *The Social Economy: International Perspectives on Economic Solidarity*; David Barkin and Blanca Lemus, 2011, “La Economía Ecológica y Solidaria: Una propuesta frente a nuestra crisis”, *Sustentabilidades* No. 5; Boaventura de Sousa Santos (ed.), 2006, *Another Production is Possible: Beyond the Capitalist Canon*; Noya and Clarence (eds.), 2007, *The Social Economy: Building Inclusive Economies*; Orlando Núñez, 1996, “La economía solidaria asociativa y autogestionaria”; Darryl Reed and J.J. McMurty (eds.), 2009, *Co-operatives in a Global Economy: The Challenges of Co-operation across Borders*.

## ***The current expansion and transformation of SSE***

Various economic, institutional, political and cultural shifts currently appear to be favouring the expansion of SSE and promoting changes in organizational forms. These include:

- market pressures and failures that are prompting individual workers or producers to associate in an attempt to secure jobs, increase bargaining power and reduce transaction costs;
- the increasing number of governments and regional and international organizations with laws, policies and programmes supporting forms of SSE;
- movements of workers, small farmers, women, consumers, environmentalists and others, as well as NGO and academic networks, advocating and otherwise supporting SSE; and
- the diffusion of values and philosophical currents, such as those reflected in terms and concepts like food sovereignty, *Buen Vivir*, *décroissance*, business responsibility and voluntary simplicity.

Notable contemporary developments include:

- “new” forms of production and exchange, such as fair trade, community credit and complementary currencies, and the expansion of networked women’s self-help groups and social enterprise;
- the increasing engagement of grant-dependent service provisioning NGOs with income-generating activities, particularly in contexts where funding has become more constrained;
- the revival of “old” forms of production and exchange, such as cooperatives and barter, and the turn towards such forms by workers, producers, trade unions and others in contexts of economic crisis;
- the fact that some SSE organizations and networks have scaled up to include hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of participants, and generate significant revenues and market share; and
- the organization of informal or own-account workers/producers, or the shift from “individual popular economy” to “associative popular economy”.

Much is known, often anecdotally, about the myriad SSE organizations and practices that exist locally, and the ways they address multiple development objectives. From a broad-based development and justice perspective, the attraction of SSE relates to its potential in terms of “holistic” or integrated development—i.e., these forms of production and exchange, in principle or in practice, yield a range of benefits associated with social and environmental protection, social cohesion, local employment generation and economic development, cultural diversity, democratic decision making and empowerment. From the perspective of key contemporary development challenges—for example, food security, rural development, gender equality, informal economy and decent work—the potential of SSE seems particularly pertinent. Furthermore, social relations and other features of SSE are often held up as an alternative to particular relations and institutions of capitalism—exploitation, coercive competition and commodification—associated with high developmental, social and environmental costs, as well as with recurring and severe crises.

## ***The focus of the UNRISD inquiry***

Far less is known about the conditions that enable SSE initiatives to move beyond the micro-, project or community level, and to multiply and expand locally, nationally, regionally and globally. As SSE expands, the organizations and networks involved become increasingly embedded in relations with state and market actors and institutions—local, state and federal governments; public policy and law; markets, corporations and global value chains—as well as civil society networks and social movements. The literature on SSE also often fails to interrogate sufficiently the challenges and contradictions involved as SSE expands and interacts more intensively with market and state institutions, or with different types of civil society networks and social movements.

From a research perspective, the UNRISD inquiry has two main objectives: (i) to understand the conditions and contexts that enable SSE to expand; and (ii) 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. What sort of enabling environment is needed for SSE realize its potential and sustain itself over the long term? As organizations and networks expand, does SSE conform or deviate from core principles and objectives? How can constraints and contradictions be addressed?

From a policy perspective, the inquiry aims to give more visibility to SSE in United Nations policy debates and bring to the attention of policy makers key findings and recommendations from researchers around the world on the potential and limits of SSE, its role in addressing contemporary development challenges, and its place in a post-2015 development agenda. The UNRISD inquiry will be undertaken in close collaboration with a number of other United Nations organizations.

While UNRISD has a particular interest in developing countries, proposals for papers that examine the relevance of SSE experiences in the global North for SSE in the global South, or that adopt a comparative perspective, will also be considered.

Important limitations characterize much of the literature on SSE. Reflecting the long history of social economy in several countries or regions of Europe and North and South America, the analysis of SSE often focuses on these geographical areas. Knowledge is also fragmented due to both linguistic divides and academic specialization by discipline that can limit inquiry into the complex ways in which multiple conditions and contexts interact to produce scale effects, inclusiveness and sustainability. Furthermore, much writing is infused with idealistic optimism and advocacy-driven claims, which can downplay the challenges, limits and contradictions associated with SSE.

The UNRISD Call for Papers aims to promote critical inquiry into the potential and limits of SSE. It does so in a context where the international development community is now paying more attention to the issue of development alternatives and laying the groundwork for a new development agenda beyond the 2015 Millennium Development Goals. A growing number of governments and regional bodies are also considering enhanced support for SSE, and numerous social movements and civil society networks are promoting SSE as a distinctive pathway to human security and sustainability.

The Call for Papers and Symposium form part of a broader UNRISD inquiry into social development alternatives that is feeding into UN processes shaping a post-2015 development agenda.

## Research Themes and Questions

Through this Call for Papers, UNRISD invites proposals that address the following themes and questions.

**1. Conceptualizing, measuring and appraising SSE**—How can SSE be meaningfully defined? Can quite different forms of organization and enterprise be subsumed under one category or term (SSE)? Does it make sense to conceptualize SSE in terms of “non-capitalist” development? From the perspective of comparative political economy, does the space for SSE vary under different varieties of capitalism and types of welfare regime? How might SSE and its expansion be measured? Is the potential often ascribed to SSE justified? Does this potential really exist in contexts where SSE expands because of the retreat of the state or coping strategies in contexts of market failure and crisis? How do these different economic, technological, organizational, institutional, cultural and political conditions interact to facilitate, constrain or otherwise affect both the scale and quality of organizations? What is the role of gender dynamics in the expansion of SSE? How does SSE relate to other sectors such as the informal economy, for-profit enterprise and state provisioning? From the perspectives of inclusiveness, decent work, empowerment, gender equity and sustainability, how consistent or contradictory are the different organizational forms that are associated with SSE? Is there a tension between the expansion of SSE and its social/cooperative/solidaristic values and orientation?

**2. Expanding SSE through market relations**—As SSE organizations and networks diversify and expand, they are increasingly immersed in market relations associated with finance, inputs, labour, trade and consumer demand, and must interact with global corporations and compete with for-profit enterprise. How do such relations affect the scaling-up and substance of SSE? How can the effects of market relations, which often disadvantage workers, small producers and the environment, be addressed? How are scaled-up organizations and networks managing the balance between self-provisioning/reliance, solidarity and market exchange? As SSE organizations grow, how are they affected by issues of efficiency, productivity and managerial capacity? As SSE organizations interact with commercial enterprise or corporations, how do they fare in terms of bargaining power and fair or unfair competition? And as they penetrate retail markets and build market share, what is the scope for changing purchasing and consumption patterns in ways that are compatible with solidarity and distributive and environmental justice?

**3. Enabling SSE through public policy and the state**—There are increasing calls on governments and parliaments to support SSE via infrastructure, procurement, credit, education/training, social and labour market policy, land rights and greater scope for participation in the policy process. Under what conditions are politicians and policy makers supporting SSE? What types of public policies, laws and government programmes have facilitated or hindered scaling-up? Are the resources and institutional support provided by governments tokenistic or substantive? Do governments have the institutional capacity and will to follow through on policy commitments? Does this capacity and will exist at the local level? Does decentralization make a difference? How sustainable are incentives and subsidies? Is public policy effectively leveling the playing field for SSE? How are macroeconomic, trade, investment and industrial policies facilitating or constraining SSE? How important are health, education, labour market and other social policies as an enabler of SSE? Are the values and ethos of SSE reproduced and applied when state entities become actively involved in its promotion? What are the risks? Do donor policies that support private sector development, entrepreneurialism and micro-finance help or hinder the expansion of SSE?

**4. Social movements, networks and the politics of change**— Significant shifts in public policy and law require the backing of social and political actors and coalitions, yet calls for increased support for SSE often ignore the political economy of policy change. To what extent are social movements, trade unions and networks of NGOs, social enterprises, self-help groups and other SSE organizations building “countervailing” power and coalitions and accessing and influencing policy making. Are such movements and networks (re-)framing common sense understandings of appropriate development agendas and priorities? What happens in contexts where social movements are fragmented, relatively weak and lack policy influence? Is collective organization at the local level being scaled up to national and regional levels? How do gender discrimination and inequality affect the participation of women in SSE advocacy and governance? What are the risks and implications of cooptation or of demobilization once partial gains have been achieved? How does the orientation of SSE vary depending on the nature of the networks or movements involved?

## Submission Process

To participate in the Call for Papers, please submit the following by **15 November 2012**:

- An extended abstract (500-1,000 words), outlining the main issues, hypotheses, arguments, country/regional focus, case studies to be considered, and structure of the paper.
- CV (*including nationality*) and full contact details.

By **15 December 2012**, successful candidates will be notified and invited to submit a draft paper (approximately 6,000 words), due no later than **30 March 2013**.

Some candidates will also be invited to prepare shorter think pieces of approximately 1,500 words for publication on the UNRISD website and global promotion via the UNRISD eBulletin.

The international symposium is provisionally planned for **6-8 May 2013** at the United Nations in Geneva. It is anticipated that UNRISD will be able to cover travel and accommodation costs. In the event of financial restrictions, priority will be given to researchers from developing countries.

Subject to peer review, selected papers will be published under the UNRISD research paper series, in an edited volume through a commercial publisher or as a special issue of an academic journal. They should, therefore, not be under consideration for publication elsewhere.

**For further information, see [www.unrisd.org/sse](http://www.unrisd.org/sse)  
To submit abstracts contact [sse@unrisd.org](mailto:sse@unrisd.org)**

UNRISD is an autonomous research institute within the UN system that undertakes multidisciplinary research and policy analysis on the social dimensions of contemporary development issues. Through our work, we aim to ensure that social equity, inclusion and justice are central to development thinking, policy and practice.

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Palais des Nations    ▪    1211 Geneva 10    ▪    Switzerland    ▪    [info@unrisd.org](mailto:info@unrisd.org)    ▪    [www.unrisd.org](http://www.unrisd.org)