
Solidarity and Social Economy Enterprises and Organisations (SSEOs)

Time to step up to the challenge and claim a rightful role in the international arena

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At the 76th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, world leaders discussed the need to scale-up ambition to address key global challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, political extremism, and widening inequality¹. The most meaningful way to address all these challenges would be through the 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, according to the latest assessments, the SDGs will not be realized by 2030 if the world's development is based on business as usual. There is need to identify the approaches that work and to increase support for them.

SSEOs can play a substantive role in achieving the SDGs, especially considering its different roles in the economy and in society. SSEOs have a solid and positive track record that can allow them to make major contributions to the achievement of the SDGs however they are not adequately represented in the international organizations and hence have less opportunities to influence the outcome of treaty negotiations covering labour, business and societal issues and are not able to officially take part in international discussions on key socio-economic development issues. What follows are a few examples how cooperatives and SSEs (SSEOs) are excluded from international processes.

International Labour Organization

The ILO counts 186 out of 193 UN member states plus the Cook Islands. It is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, with around 40 field offices around the world. The ILO's international labour standards are aimed at ensuring accessible, productive, and sustainable work worldwide in conditions of freedom, equity, security and dignity. They are set forth in 189 conventions and treaties, of which eight are classified as fundamental according to the 1998 Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work².

The Governing Body is the executive body of the International Labour Organization. It meets three times a year, in March, June and November. The Governing Body is composed of 56 titular members (28 governments, 14 employers

and 14 workers) and 66 deputy members (28 governments, 19 employers and 19 workers). Ten of the titular government seats are permanently held by States of chief industrial importance: Brazil, China, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States. The other Government members are elected by the Conference every three years (the last elections were held in June 2017). The Employer and Worker members are elected in their individual capacity by their respective constituencies.

The ILO has a unit dedicated to cooperatives and its enterprise division also includes a focus on the Social and Solidarity Economy stating that: *"Recent global economic and political instability has served to underline the shortcomings of our current development system and further confirm the necessity for an alternate or complementary development paradigm. The social and solidarity economy (SSE) is a viable solution to re-balancing economic, social and environmental objectives"*.³

While the work being done to support cooperatives and SSEs by the ILO is of high quality and much appreciated, the political situation remains biased in favour of governments and traditional industrial actors such as employers and labour unions. Cooperatives and SSEs do not have independent representation at the ILO governing body despite their many years of independent role and contributions to economic and social development.

The High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development at the United Nations

The High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) is the main United Nations platform dealing with sustainable development, and was formally established in July 2013. It meets every year under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council, and every four years under the auspices of the General Assembly⁴.

1 Mahmoud Mohieldin, United Nations Special Envoy on Financing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Blog UNU-Wider, 21 October 2021: *From summits to solutions: what success means at COP26*: <https://www.wider.unu.edu/publication/summits-solutions-what-success-means-cop26>

2 ILO (1998), *ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work*. <https://www.ilo.org/declaration/lang-en/index.htm>

3 [Shttp://www.ilo.ch/global/topics/cooperatives/WCMS_442089/lang-en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.ch/global/topics/cooperatives/WCMS_442089/lang-en/index.htm)

4 <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/major-groups/hlpf>

Major Groups and other stakeholders have been granted comprehensive participatory opportunities in the HLPF through the UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/67/290. Paragraph 15 of the Resolution states that, while retaining the intergovernmental character of the HLPF, Major Groups representatives and other relevant stakeholders shall be allowed to:

- Attend all official meetings of the forum;
- Have access to all official information and documents;
- Intervene in official meetings;
- Submit documents and present written and oral contributions;
- Make recommendations;
- Organize side events and round tables, in cooperation with Member States and the Secretariat.

In other words, being a Major Group or a Stakeholder Group allows for active participation in most of the major meetings at the United Nations.

There are 9 Major Groups and 12 Stakeholder Groups⁵. The nine Major Groups include the following sectors: Women, Children and Youth, Indigenous Peoples, Non-Governmental Organizations, Local Authorities, Workers and Trade Unions, Business and Industry, Scientific and Technological Community, and Farmers.

The Stakeholder Groups consist of the following representative NGOs: Volunteer Group, Migrants, Older Persons, Persons with Disabilities, Educational and Academic Entities, Human Rights, Beyond 2015, Persons with disabilities, financing for Development, Together 2030, Sendai SG Mechanism, and LGBTI group, AP RCEM, ECE RCEM, Africa Reg MGoS and Communities DW&D.

However, cooperatives and SSE are not represented in these official and informal meetings, neither as Major Group nor as Stakeholder Group which is an important lacuna in the international debates on sustainable development of the 2030 Agenda and its 17 sustainable development goals. The SDGs are meant to be inclusive, transparent and participatory. All three qualifications are very much part of the DNA of cooperatives and SSE organizations. Gaining recognized official status as new Stakeholder Group would enable Cooperatives

and SSE to provide essential guidance for integrated sustainable economic and social development which are not covered as comprehensively by the existing major groups nor stakeholder groups.

— Other institutional representation

The International Chamber of commerce has been granted Observer Status at the United Nations in December 2016—providing businesses with direct access into the UN system for the very first time⁶. Employers and Trade Unions, already present at the ILO (tripartism) are also part of the G20 as B20⁷ and L20⁸ and the United National Secretary and the Founder Director of the World Economic Forum (WEF) signed a strategic partnership in 2019⁹.

Business and Labour are given institutional roles to contribute and influence major international organizations and venue. Unfortunately, cooperatives and SSEs are without an institutional representation and hence cannot clarify their unique strengths nor contribute to finding sustainable solutions beyond the traditional mold of economic and social frameworks which have proven to be short on providing alternatives to the multiple current impasses of economic and social crises.

In conclusion, best efforts should be made to provide SSEEOs access to the international decision making organizations and institutions. They have many years of track record in positive socio-economic development but have no institutional voice and hence are not allowed to contribute to multilateral organizations such as the United Nations and its many agencies. In fact, SSEEOs are active in all sectors relevant for the SDGs. Due to their integration of economic and social activities, they understand the nature of interdependent and multi-stakeholder activities. It is time for SSEEOs to step up to the challenge and to start the process of gaining recognition and obtaining the right to bring their many faceted know-how and skills to the table of international development and partnership.

DOI: 10.7425/IS.2022.01.05

⁵ HLPF Working Group Membership: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Me-0hDpkmtFu-D82HwlpZmGJtqo2gAeyfndI-2HWnU/edit?pli=1>

⁶ ICC: International Chamber of Commerce: [https://iccwbo.org/global-issues-trends/global-go-](https://iccwbo.org/global-issues-trends/global-go)

[vernance/business-and-the-united-nations/](https://www.global-solutions-initiative.org/the-g20-t20/)

⁷ G20 Business 20 (B20) Summit 2021: <https://sdg.iisd.org/events/g20-business-20-b20-summit-2021/>

⁸ G20 & T20, Towards an intellectual backbone of the G20: [https://www.global-solutions-initiative.](https://www.global-solutions-initiative.org/the-g20-t20/)

[org/the-g20-t20/](https://www.weforum.org/press/2019/06/world-economic-forum-and-un-sign-strategic-partnership-framework)

⁹ <https://www.weforum.org/press/2019/06/world-economic-forum-and-un-sign-strategic-partnership-framework>