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BUILDING INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES THROUGH SDGs AND SSE INITIATIVES

Edited by

Denison Jayasooria and Benjamin R. Quiñones, Jr.



Joint Publication of MySDG Academy and ASEC

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Published by:

**Persatuan Promosi Matlamat Pembangunan Lestari
(Society for Promotion of Sustainable Development Goals)**

A-1-10, Blok A, 8 Avenue, Jalan Sungai Jernih 8/1, Seksyen 8,
46050 Petaling Jaya, Selangor.

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(Society for Promotion of Sustainable Development Goals) 2024

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Indigenous organic farmers from Melai village in Tasik Chini, Pahang, Malaysia

e ISBN: 978-629-99436-1-7

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Foreword

Benjamin R. Quiñones, Jr.

Founder, Asian Solidarity Economy Council (ASEC)

On 26 - 28 January 2024, the All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia on Sustainable Development Goals (APPGM-SDG) and the MySDG Academy in collaboration with the Asian Solidarity Economy Council (ASEC) convened the “International Conference on Building Inclusive Communities.” More than 120 participants from 16 countries attended the conference, including representatives of international organizations such as the ILO, the United Nations Office in Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei, and the RIPESS (Intercontinental Network for the Promotion of Social Solidarity Economy).

The conference was the first of its kind in Malaysia that examined the association between social and solidarity economy (SSE) and the SDGs, following the cue from the UN General Assembly Resolution 77/281 entitled “Promoting the social and solidarity economy for sustainable development” on 18 April 2023, which acknowledged the key role SSE can play in localizing the SDGs, particularly in terms of employment and decent work, the provision of social services, such as those related to health and care, education and skills training, and environmental protection.

The main objectives of the conference were to: understand how building inclusive communities foster social inclusion and ensure no one is left behind; examine the distinct features of SSE entities and their role in the implementation of the SDGs in diverse local contexts; and identify innovative or unique approaches in building inclusive communities that could be adopted more widely to accelerate progress towards the SDGs in Asia.

The Conference brought about a budding understanding of the term “social and solidarity economy” or SSE. As explained at the opening

session, SSE refers to the production of goods and services by a broad range of organizations and enterprises (referred to as “SSE entities”) that have explicit social and often environmental objectives, and are guided by principles and practices of cooperation, solidarity, ethics and democratic self-management. Heejin Ahn of ILO clarified that SSE entities may have overlapping features with enterprises categorized as social impact business (SIB) or inclusive business (IB), but there are key distinctive features, namely: (1) collective ownership and participatory governance. SSE entities are collectively owned and managed, while other types of businesses (SIB, IB) may be individually owned and managed; (2) primacy of people and social purpose over capital in the distribution and use of surpluses and/or profits. SSE entities put people and social purpose over profits, while SIBs and IBs put people and planet alongside profit; and (3) the societal and/or political function of the SSE. Through collective action, SSE entities can empower its members, users, beneficiaries, and communities, and enhance their bargaining power vis-à-vis other businesses.

The above distinctive features are evident in the cases reported in this publication. They may be classified into the more familiar types of organizations, as follows:

- *cooperatives* (HomeNet Producers Cooperative, Koperasi Ekonomi Rakyat Selangor Bhd, and Koperasi Komuniti Bioarang Jeli Bhd);
- *service-provisioning NGOs* (Serikat Petani Pasundan, and Perkhidmatan Sosial dan Pembangunan Komuniti (PSPK))
- *community-based organizations* (Association for Sarva Seva Farms, Badja Weavers Association, Community-based Forest User Groups)
- *social enterprises* (DEW Crafts, HomeNet Thailand Brand, Suphanburi Garbage Revolution Community Enterprise)
- *association of informal economy workers* (HomeNet Pakistan)

A big eye opener for many participants of the conference, and perhaps the readers of this publication too, is the overwhelming evidence provided by the case studies about SSE as an effective means of implementing the SDGs. The SDGs most frequently implemented by

the SSE entities are: SDG 8 Decent work and economic growth; SDG 1 No poverty; SDG 5 Gender equality; SDG 4 Access to quality education; SDG 17 Partnerships; SDG 10 Reduced inequalities; SDG 12 Responsible consumption and production; SDG 13 Climate action; and SDG 16 Peace, justice, and strong institutions, in that order of prevalence. A few of them also implemented SDG 2 Zero hunger; SDG 3 Good health and well-being; and SDG 15 Life on land. This finding brings hope that a concerted mapping of SSE entities in the country and their contributions to SDGs, which are not included in the government's SDG report due precisely to the dearth of research studies in this field, could provide evidence of more robust progress in fulfilling the SDGs.

An interesting feature of this publication are a couple of unique and innovative cases of partnerships for SDGs between the government and non-State actors including SSE entities. The experiences of the APPGM-SDG (All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia on Sustainable Development Goals) and the PESO (Public Employment Service Office) of Quezon City, Philippines, show that government support in terms of conducive public policy, technical and financial assistance could effectively activate the distinct features of SSE entities - namely democratic and/or participatory governance, primacy of people and social purpose over profits, and societal or political empowerment, and help facilitate social inclusion of the poor and vulnerable by empowering them, building cohesive and resilient communities, and making institutions accessible and accountable to citizens.

It is hoped that policymakers who read this publication will be encouraged to pay the much-needed attention to social and solidarity economy (SSE) as a means of regenerating and developing local communities. Understanding the characteristics of the SSE will enable policymakers to build ecosystems in which SSE entities can grow and develop. Research institutions may find the cases reported here to be scattered and anecdotal, lacking robust methodologies and indicators to measure the impact of SSE in achieving the SDGs. Yet, this shortcoming could spur them to undertake a systematic analysis of the contribution of SSE to the SDGs.

We at the Asian Solidarity Economy Council (ASEC), having spearheaded the promotion of the concept and practice of Social and Solidarity Economy in Asia, though with meager resources, would certainly welcome partnerships with governments and international agencies in undertaking research, data collection and knowledge transfer as an important component of the SSE ecosystem.

Introduction

Denison Jayasooria

Head of Secretariat,

*All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia on
Sustainable Development Goals (APPGM-SDG)*

Accelerating SDGs is the key focus of SSE partners around the world. We only have another seven years to reach 2030, however, we are told that most countries are behind their targets due to the impact of COVID-19. Nonetheless, we are beginning to see that there is a grassroots movement of organisations who are making a difference.

This book entitled “Building Inclusive Communities through SDGs and SSE Initiatives” has documented the grassroots experiences of 14 organisations from eight different Asian countries. Dr Ben Quiñones has described the context in which these case studies were presented at an international conference in Malaysia in January 2024.

The holistic development theme of the SDGs with the tagline of *leaving no one behind* is well adopted by many Asian grassroots organisations as these organisations view development from a multi-dimensional aspect. The focus is not just on building the income of the poor but also empowering them to address immediate needs as well as confront structural injustices through collective action.

Linking the SDGs and SSE as a framework for community empowerment is unique and these fourteen case studies illustrate the possibilities at the grassroots. It is looking at organisations working on a business model but with a difference as seen in the framework of operations that adopt a people-over-project approach. This is not tokenism or just words but concrete examples of grassroots communities working on an alternative model of development which lays equal emphasis on economic, social, environmental and governance.

This book has fifteen chapters, with the first as an overview of the SDGs and SSE in Asia noting the features based on ILO studies undertaken in Asia. Heejin Ahn of ILO Asia provides an overview article which sets the macro context of the case studies including definitions to terms like SSE.

In these case studies, the focus is on how SSE organisations are utilizing the SDGs framework in the delivery of socio-economic programs and in reaching the most disadvantaged in society. This could be viewed as accelerating SDGs at the grassroots and more public officials need to recognize this and create enabling policy environments for the multiplying effects of these examples.

These communities could be women in the informal sector in both rural and urban areas, forest users, farmers, craftspersons, and weavers. These community-based initiatives ensure that they are not left behind in socio-economic development.

The eight countries covered are four from South Asia: India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal, and another four from South East Asia, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Philippines. It is significant to note that there are major differences among these countries, such as cultural and linguistic, ethnic, and religious as well as levels of socio-economic development as seen from per capita incomes in these countries. There are Hindu majority communities like in India and Nepal, Muslim majority countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia and Malaysia, Christian majority nations like Philippines and Buddhist majority countries like Thailand.

While communities differ in culture, religion and ethnicity, however, in the unique application of the SDGs and SSE principles, they find some common synergies in values adopted such as community solidarity, people empowerment, their quest for social justice and their drive for self-reliance and resilience not just to survive but to improve their lives for the betterment of their children, families and local communities.

The fourteen articles in this book can be divided into four major themes:

THEME	CASE STUDIES
Women Empowerment	There are four case studies here - HomeNet in Pakistan, Thailand and the Philippines well-illustrates this theme. The self-help groups of Tamil Nadu are also good examples.
Environmental Sustainability	The two case studies here illustrate how local communities manage waste as a collective activity and generate income through this.
Rural and Forest-based Communities	Two of three feature forest-based communities involved in income generation and conservation. The third is on rural farmers in land ownership and reform.
Social Enterprises and Social Business Models	<p>Doing business differently is well-illustrated by the five case studies here. Two of these are unique, as supported by parliamentarians through the APPGM-SDG in Malaysia and another by the local government in Quezon city.</p> <p>Two others highlight the potential of traditional craftspersons and weavers, and another describes the work of a NGO in empowering women and transforming communities.</p>

All these case studies utilize the seven key features of SSE and detail how these projects impact the SDGs in terms of goals and targets. These fourteen examples well illustrate the potential of grassroots groups. The impact numbers are large in many countries, and these are people on the sidelines of development.

Both ASEC and the MySDG Academy have found case studies writing very helpful in defining the target group and community, the specific interventions and its correlations to both SSE and the SDGs. There is, of course, another level of more in-depth analysis on income groups and social change in the lives of the people involved. These studies will involve funds and modalities for measurement and documentation.

However, these fourteen case studies and the ILO overview paper does give us a compelling case to take a second look at grassroots movements which are contributing to the realisation of the SDGs, especially for the most vulnerable groups. It is the hope of ASEC that public policymakers will take note and create a favorable public policy environment for the future growth of the SSE organisations.

The publishing of this book comes a year after the UN SSE Resolution (A/RES/77/281) (Appendix 1). The Asian case studies were recently highlighted in the Anniversary Webinar for the United Nations General Assembly Resolution: “Promoting the Social and Solidarity Economy for Sustainable Development” hosted by the UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Social and Solidarity Economy on 18 April 2024 (Appendix 2). This is a contribution by ASEC to the growing SSE-SDGs movement.

I take this opportunity to thank all the contributors for their valuable writing. A special word of thanks to my co-editor, Dr Ben Quiñones who continues to inspire us with his thoughts. My appreciation also to Zoel Ng, Hirzawati Atikah Mohd Tahir and Debbie Ann Loh for their efforts in editing, artwork and publishing this book.

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Mr. Rogelio L. Reyes, a dedicated community development practitioner with a Masters in Community Development, has worked tirelessly with diverse communities, including youth groups, the homeless, cooperatives, and church organizations. Rising from a driver and encoder, he now leads as the Department Head of QC Public Employment Service Office and serves as a part-time faculty member at two universities. Committed to the 'pay it forward' concept, Mr. Rogelio aspires to contribute further to the community and dreams of becoming a farmer for national food security and economic development.

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Building Inclusive Communities through SSE: An Asian Overview

Chapter 1

Social and Solidarity Economy's Contribution to Promoting Access and Inclusion of the Sustainable Development Goals in Asia

Heejin Ahn

ABSTRACT

This paper presents an overview of the social and solidarity economy in Asia – phase 2 project implemented in the context of the global momentum on the social and solidarity economy (SSE), conceptual boundaries of the SSE, and historical origins and outside influences that shaped the contemporary understanding of the SSE landscape in five countries – Cambodia, Mongolia, Kyrgyzstan, Thailand, and Viet Nam. The project identifies the types of organizations and enterprises that can be considered as being part of the SSE, and analyzes challenges, opportunities, and preliminary pathways to strengthen the social and solidarity economy ecosystem. The SSE is neither a ‘magic bullet’ nor an end, but can be an effective means of supporting progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in areas where there are decent work deficits, and where they are most relevant. This paper posits that SSE's distinct features, namely democratic and or participatory governance, primacy of people and purpose over profits, and its societal and political empowerment function, can facilitate access and inclusion for persons, especially vulnerable and marginalized groups, thereby accelerating progress towards the SDGs.

INTRODUCTION – SOCIAL AND SOLIDARITY ECONOMY IN ASIA

The Asian financial crisis of 1997 reawakened the spirit of reciprocity rooted in many Asian cultures. It paved the way for the emergence of the social and solidarity economy, a development further accelerated by the global financial crisis of 2007–08. The SSE in the Asia and the Pacific region encompasses cooperatives, associations, community self-help groups and mutual aid organizations, with a long trajectory

in the region. It also includes social enterprises, a new form of enterprise that blends social objectives with income-generating activity, and grassroots and community-based organizations representing and supporting people, including women and youth, indigenous people, migrants, and informal economy workers (ILO 2022).

Although there is a vibrant and rich landscape of entities that are part of the social and solidarity economy, the entities as a collective are not visible in the policy space, and their contribution is not adequately measured, recognized and visible. While legal or policy measures for specific types of SSE entities exist, for example, for cooperatives and social enterprises, there are no framework laws or policies that encompass all elements of the SSE, as defined by the ILC and UN resolutions.¹

As a result, policymakers may not invite social and solidarity economy representatives to the table where national and local sustainable development strategies are being negotiated or reviewed. Policymakers may also find it difficult to distinguish genuine social and solidarity economy entities from pseudo-SSE entities and support them adequately, through appropriate measures such as accreditation, grants, tax incentives, access to public procurement, and business development services. Determining the types of entities that are part of the social and solidarity economy can help in the design of efficient policies and develop targeted support measures to support its development (OECD 2023).

The ILO undertook a study to map the SSE landscape in five countries through the Strengthening the Social and Solidarity Economy in Asia – Phase 2 Project², supported by the Government of Korea. The project

¹ International Labour Conference – 110th Session, 2022. Resolution concerning decent work and the social and solidarity economy; United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2023 on “Promoting the Social and Solidarity Economy for Sustainable Development.”

² [https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/cooperatives/projects/WCMS_817001/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/cooperatives/projects/WCMS_817001/lang-en/index.htm)

aimed to bring clarity into the scope, size, impact, limitations, and potential of the social and solidarity economy. The initiative facilitated the Member States to implement the UN and ILO Resolutions and the OECD Recommendation on the Social and Solidarity Economy and Social Innovation³ to promote a set of standards, guidelines, and recommendations to promote the SSE for countries, regions, and cities through a participatory and consultative process. Because the term “social and solidarity economy” is relatively new in the region, co-constructing the local understanding of the SSE is critical to co-produce potential avenues in which the social and solidarity economy could be supported by relevant actors.

The study examined the organizations and enterprises that exhibit by law and practice, the five principles of the SSE (voluntary cooperation, mutual aid, democratic and/or participatory governance, autonomy and independence, and primacy of people and social purpose over capital) and two additional features (engaged in economic activities, and social and environmental activities), to map the SSE landscape in five countries – Cambodia, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Thailand, and Viet Nam. The study employed an inclusive and holistic approach, considering local specificities - cultural, social, economic, and historical factors – and covering entities that operate in both the formal and informal economy, be they registered or not, as well as local organizations that are outside the organizational types mentioned in the definition provided in Section 2 (i.e., rotating savings groups, neighbourhood associations, street vendor associations). This study went beyond the legalistic analysis, to capture the “lived realities” of members, users, and communities involved in the social and solidarity economy on the ground, through interviews and focus group discussions.

This open, flexible approach allowed for a nuanced, and contextual understanding of the diverse entities that observe principles of the SSE and understand why they observe certain principles and not others. What are the obstacles and challenges experienced by SSE

³ <https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-0472>

actors on the ground? What is working well, and what could help these entities adopt or strengthen the features (if they wish to do so) that could further enable them to achieve their social, societal/political, economic and/or environmental objectives? The studies feature examples of SSE entities as case studies to see how they operationalize features of the social and solidarity economy, that are unique and set them apart from other enterprises. The study reveals gaps and challenges in the ecosystem (ie. policies, access to finance, markets, business development services) and derived preliminary recommendations to strengthen the SSE ecosystem in five countries.

CLARIFYING CONCEPTUAL DEFINITIONS

Defining conceptual boundaries can be a challenge as social and solidarity economy reflect considerable diversity in terms of their goals (mutual versus general interest), legal status, organizational forms, business models, size, outreach, and sectors (OECD 2023).

The social and solidarity economy (SSE) is an inclusive term that encompasses the fields of the social economy and solidarity economy. It is shaped by long-standing traditions of social economy including formal entities such as associations, cooperatives, foundations, social enterprises, and other country-specific entities. It also includes grassroots or community-based entities of the solidarity economy, shaped by a transformative vision that empowers the poor and marginalized persons to become active participants in the economic transformation, and to fight and call for an equitable distribution of economic and social gains. The social economy' calls for greater solidarity and social inclusion, reclaiming the rights of the vulnerable and marginalized groups that have been subjugated by the unequal hierarchies and dynamics re(produced) by the neoliberal market.

The universal definition of the social and solidarity economy, in the UN and ILO Resolutions is:

“Social and solidarity economy encompasses enterprises, organizations and other entities that are engaged in economic, social and environmental activities to serve the collective and/or general interest, which are based on the principles of voluntary

cooperation and mutual aid, democratic and/or participatory governance, autonomy and independence and the primacy of people and social purpose over capital in the distribution and use of surpluses and/or profits, as well as assets, that social and solidarity economy entities aspire to long-term viability and sustainability and to the transition from the informal to the formal economy and operate in all sectors of the economy, that they put into practice a set of values which are intrinsic to their functioning and consistent with care for people and planet, equality and fairness, interdependence, self-governance, transparency and accountability and the attainment of decent work and livelihoods and that, according to national circumstances, the social and solidarity economy includes cooperatives, associations, mutual societies, foundations, social enterprises, self-help groups and other entities operating in accordance with the values and principles of the social and solidarity economy” (UN 2023; ILO 2022).

The term “social and solidarity economy” is relatively new and not well-known in the Asia-Pacific region, but its historical roots can be found in many Asian cultures. Principles of solidarity, reciprocity, and mutuality are deeply rooted in the five countries’ diverse cultures and traditions, and shaped by social, political, and economic trajectories. For instance, enterprises and organizations in Cambodia are influenced by principles of Buddhist economics, (2010) which call for economic activities to be conducted in an ethical and sustainable way. In Thailand, the self-sufficiency philosophy proposed by King Bhumibol Adulyadej, is centred on three principles – moderation, reasonableness, and self-immunity – towards empowering and strengthening communities and building resilience. The collective economy in Viet Nam, in which cooperatives is a central component, prioritizes economic and social interests of its members, fosters cooperation among members, enriches its members and develops the community. In Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan, the principles of solidarity, mutuality and reciprocity are derived from nomadic cultural traditions of trust, cooperation, and mutual assistance.

SSE entities do not operate in isolation or within a vacuum. Their operations are shaped by legislations and government regulations, and influenced by social, cultural, and historical factors. They are embedded in the context in which they operate and interact with markets, civil society, and public actors.

SSE entities interact with private sector businesses in different capacities in the processes of value chains as a supplier, a distributor, or a Business-to-Business (B2B) provider. They can also be created by big conglomerates, for instance, Lotte Home Shopping⁴ selling products from social enterprise, while others have established social enterprises themselves, such as Kyobo Life Insurance⁵ creating Dasomi Foundation⁶ to provide free or affordable care and nursing services for vulnerable groups, and employment opportunities for women from female-headed households in the Republic of Korea. SSE entities can also benefit from financial resources, access to markets, materials, human and social capital, and knowledge and expertise of the private sector businesses (Di Domenico et al. 2009; Sakarya et al. 2012).

There is a growing landscape of socially and environmentally conscious businesses that have similar features as the SSE entities. The traditional notion of businesses as seeking to maximize return on investment and shareholder value has shifted to businesses observing Responsible Business Conduct standards, and pursuing the triple bottom line; prioritizing profit, people, and the planet. This is evident in the rise of corporate responsibility or B Corp certification, fuelled by a growing concern for a more responsible, ethical, and caring society. This trend has blurred the conceptual boundaries between the SSE and other similar terms, such as social impact businesses, inclusive businesses, circular economy, environmental, social and governance (ESG) with overlapping features.

⁴ https://www.lotteimall.com/main/viewMain.lotte#disp_no=5223317

⁵ <https://www.kyobo.com/>

⁶ <https://sehub.tistory.com/258>

The concept of “social entrepreneurship” and “social enterprises” loosely defined as “businesses that seek to achieve social and/or environmental impact through the trading of goods and services”⁷ has grown in popularity throughout countries in Asia and the Pacific. A study conducted by the British Council (2021) estimates that up to a million social enterprises operate across the region. A similar, overlapping term are social impact businesses that prioritize doing work that consciously, systemically, and sustainably serves or attempts to solve a local or global community need, while making social impact.

Another well-known term in the region is inclusive businesses (IB), first recognized by the G20 in 2011 is a “private sector approach to providing goods, services, and livelihoods on a commercially viable basis, either at scale or scalable, to people living at the base of the economic pyramid, making them part of the value chain of companies’ core business as suppliers, distributors, retailers, or customers.” ASEAN Economic Ministers endorsed the Guidelines for the Promotion of Inclusive Business in ASEAN⁸ in 2020. Governments such as India, Indonesia, Singapore, Viet Nam, and Thailand have implemented policies, strategies, and programmes to promote inclusive businesses, through accreditation and certification, and facilitating investment schemes.

These terms all have similarities with the SSE, namely pursuit of social, economic, and environmental objectives. They provide opportunities for creating quality and equitable jobs and providing goods and services for a particular community, often disadvantaged and marginalized groups. The key conceptual difference is in the two principles of the SSE: i) collective ownership and participatory principles, and ii) primacy of people and social purpose over capital in the distribution and use of surpluses and/or profits as well as assets and the societal and/or political function of the SSE.

⁷ There is no global definition of social enterprises; its meaning varies among countries and regions.

⁸ <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/6.-ASEAN-IB-Promotion-Guidelines-Endorsed-at-the-52nd-AEM.pdf>

SSE entities are collectively owned and managed, while other types of businesses (SIB, IB or other) may be individually owned and managed. The members, users, or beneficiaries of SSE entities can be either owners of the organization or actively take part in the decision-making process. By granting membership or the beneficiaries/users the capacity to equitably take part in decisions, these entities establish participatory operating methods (ITCILO 2010). Due to their collective and democratic and/or participatory decision-making, SSE entities collaborate and cooperate with other SSE entities, public and private actors to achieve social objectives and access resources (OECD 2023).

This participation can exist in diverse forms. In cooperatives, mutual benefit societies and associations, the principle is “one person, one vote”. One member, one vote allows for each member to have the same voting rights, independent from the number of shares he/she holds. In some SSE entities, decisions may be made by consensus (ITCILO 2010). Social enterprises can practice participation by employing the beneficiaries in their organizations, and source from the beneficiaries as upstream suppliers of products and/or services or use them as downstream distributors of finished goods (Sodhi and Tang 2014). The degree of participation can thus vary widely from one type of enterprise or organization to another, even among organizations that share the same legal status. Some SSE entities will thus be more democratic and participatory than others (ITCILO 2010).

The forms of participation can be even more varied when additional stakeholders are involved (e.g., members, beneficiaries, users) or because of the particularities of some sectors in which SSE entities are operating.

The second distinction is the distribution of profits and surplus – SSE entities put people and social purpose over profits, while inclusive businesses, social impact businesses put people and planet alongside profit. The distinction is not about how much profits can be generated as all enterprises need to generate profits for financial sustainability, but how the surplus is distributed and used. SSE entities use the profits or surplus to favor social and environmental goals, to the

benefit of communities rather than remunerating shareholders. SSE entities that distribute surplus do so based on member activity, such as work, service, usage, or patronage, rather than based on capital invested. In the event of their sale, transformation, or dissolution, many are legally bound to transfer any residual earnings or assets to a similarly restricted unit (ILO 2022).

The third distinction lies in the societal and/or political role of SSE entities. Through collective action, SSE entities can empower its members, users, beneficiaries, and communities, and enhance their bargaining power vis-à-vis other businesses. They go beyond the social impact of their products and/or services, by bringing democracy to the workplace – to dignify, uplift and represent the needs and interests of marginalized or vulnerable groups by influencing decisions by public authorities. For instance, HomeNet South-East Asia,⁹ the sub-regional network of national networks of home-based workers, advocates for and engages in policy dialogues for workers in the informal economy workers.

Due to the difference in their orientation, they may pursue different strategies when it comes to scaling and measuring impact. Because SSE entities are close to their members and the communities by providing goods and/or services (especially proximity services such as care services), they are attuned to their needs and work closely with them to address their issues. To stay true to its purpose, and keep its proximity to the communities they serve, SSE entities may grow horizontally (franchising), rather than vertically, and establish apex or federations.

SSE and Localization of the SDGs

SSE can be an effective means of implementing the SDGs.¹⁰ SSE entities often have strong local roots, guided by principles of

⁹ <https://homenetsoutheastasia.org/>

¹⁰ The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as Global Goals, were adopted by the United Nations in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030, all people will enjoy peace and prosperity. The 17 SDGs balance social, economic, and environmental sustainability.

cooperation, solidarity, democratic self-management while prioritizing social and environmental objectives beyond profit motives. The 2030 Agenda emphasizes the role of local authorities and communities in strengthening sustainable ecosystems, promoting local culture and products, fostering community cohesion and personal security, and stimulating innovation and employment (UNRISD 2017). Achieving the SDGs will only be possible when the goals and targets are localized at the national, local, and regional levels.

ACCESS AND INCLUSION THROUGH SSE PRINCIPLES AND VALUES

SSE entities can activate their distinct features, namely democratic and/or participatory governance, primacy of people and social purpose over profits, and societal or political empowerment to facilitate access to and inclusion of communities.

This paper assesses how two cases of SSE entities in Thailand promote access and inclusion, central tenants that are embedded in many of the 17 SDGs and their 169 targets. It adopts Schwettmann's approach to focus on "SSE-friendly" targets that call for better access and greater inclusion. He states that SSE entities, through their principles and values, plays a critical role to facilitate access and ensure inclusion, hence SSE entities should focus on meeting access or inclusion-related SDG targets, to accelerate the progress towards the SDGs (Schwettmann 2023).

"Access" in Target 1.4 "ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access." The term "access" appears 48 times in the 2030 Agenda, often with qualifiers such as "equal," "fair," "universal" or "affordable." SSE entities, through collective action, facilitate access to markets, to finance, to rights, to services, to knowledge, to persons and communities that may be powerless, and excluded from services rendered by the state and the private sector (Schwettmann 2023).

The term "inclusion" in Target 10.2, is defined as "the social, economic and political inclusion of all irrespective of age, sex, disability, race,

ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status.” The term “inclusion” or “inclusive” appears 14 times in the 2030 Agenda. SSE entities, by nature, identity, and purpose, are well-positioned to promote inclusivity than other forms of businesses or organizations (Schwettmann 2023).

Two case studies of SSE entities from Thailand, based on desk research and interview, demonstrate how they practise their unique features, thereby meeting the access and inclusion-oriented SDG targets.

Tamsang-Tamsong, Thailand

Tamsang-Tamsong (“You Order, We Deliver”) is a motorcycle taxi and food delivery service platform operating based on the principles of the SSE in Thailand since 2021. The platform is owned, managed, and governed by riders, restaurants, and consumers, and practises environmental sustainability. The initiative is supported by Chulalongkorn University and the Thai Health Promotion Foundation. Tamsang-Tamsong is operated by the LINE application and provides food delivery services from over 45 restaurants via QR code. The project has since expanded from Bangkok to Phuket.

Democratic and/or participatory governance

The platform was designed with the needs of workers at the centre, rather than the pursuit of profits. Tamsang-Tamsong aims to realize decent work through participatory decision-making and workplace democracy. The initiative aims to provide fair job opportunities and boost local development.

To design the platform, it convened several brainstorming sessions, facilitated, and supported by university student volunteers, with all stakeholders – restaurant owners, delivery workers, customers, and the community members - to understand their pain points and challenges and how the platform could work to support them. They came up with a platform with unique features based on local specificities, based on consensus of all stakeholders. This created a sense of ownership and trust among the stakeholders.

Tamsang-Tamsong is governed and represented by board members, that are elected based on a transparent voting system. Regular meetings are held with all stakeholders to discuss the working process, set the price, and fees for the food delivery services.

Tamsang-Tamsong promotes local development. Most of the restaurants that are registered in the platform are small, locally owned, independent restaurants and vendors that do not have visibility compared to big chain restaurants. Many do not have a website, or information is not accessible. Tamsang-Tamsong provides a platform where restaurants and vendors can access a market of consumers, supporting and empowering local businesses and boosting job creation.

Primacy of people over capital

Compared to other platform companies, the members of Tamsang-Tamsong receive higher wages, as there are no membership or commission fees, and only transaction costs (real costs). This is contrasted with mainstream food delivery platforms that maximize profits by paying low delivery fees and charging higher food prices.

For mainstream food delivery platforms, delivery drivers often require long hours on the road, and waiting time that is not compensated. Tamsang-Tamsong minimizes the time and opportunity cost for its drivers by assigning orders based on their location rather than ratings. Hence, riders can save their time and fuel costs. Riders have the option to pick up multiple orders in the same area, and they will not be penalized for rejecting orders.

Societal and/or political empowerment

Tamsang-Tamsong is working on replacing single-use plastic utensils with a food carrier, known as 'pinto (Thai traditional food container)' and eco-friendly food packaging. It plans to engage with local government agencies and implement and advocate for Thailand's Roadmap on Plastic Waste Management 2018 – 2030 for the transition to a circular economy, through plastic waste prevention and management, with the local government, private sector and civil

society. Tamsang-Tamsong participates in events and multi-stakeholder dialogue forums, such as the public forum “Platform Cooperativism: A Path Towards Fairer Digital Economy,”¹¹ to raise awareness on the democratically owned and governed digital platform cooperatives to ensure decent working conditions and rights of platform workers.

HomeNet Thailand Association

The Foundation for Labor and Employment Promotion (FLEP), founded in 1992, established HomeNet Thailand Association¹² in 2013 as a membership-based association of 5,000 home-based workers, both own account workers and homeworkers in Thailand. HomeNet Thailand Association enhances home-based workers’ capacities in production and management, promotes labor standard and social protection among informal workers, and engages in policy advocacy. FLEP has been organizing informal workers in different occupations e.g., the Network of Domestic Workers in Thailand (NDWT), Confederation of Street Vendors in Bangkok (CSVB), which are informal non-registered organizations. In 2016, FLEP and HNTA established the Federation of Informal Workers, with another three informal workers’ networks in Bangkok, NDWT, CSVB and Motorcycle Taxi Drivers Association.

Democratic and/or participatory governance

Among the groups that are members of the HomeNet Thailand Association, board members are elected based on a voting system. Board meetings take place every quarter where decisions are made collectively by voting. The elected representatives plan for and manage its marketing and business operations. Membership is open and voluntary. Members pay annual membership fees to HomeNet Thailand Association and members of NDWT, CSVB and FIT pay annual membership fees to their respective organizations. The three organizations elect their board members and have regular meetings.

¹¹<http://www.ias.chula.ac.th/en/event/public-forum-titled-platform-cooperativism-a-path-toward-a-fairer-digital-economy-platform/>

¹² HomeNet Thailand is part of a global network of membership-based organizations of home-based workers.

Primacy of people over capital

The Foundation for Labor and Employment Promotion supports its members' livelihoods by working closely with HomeNet Thailand Association and Network of Domestic Workers in Thailand to establish HomeNet Thailand Brand and Homecare Thailand, which operate based on members' investment. Experiences from HomeCare Thailand,¹³ a platform that brings together domestic workers, masseurs, elderly care workers, childcare workers, and personal care workers to provide professional services, showed that members received higher income compared to other platforms due to lower fees. It deducts 33% for equipment, travel, training, and uniform, as opposed to a higher percentage charge by other platform companies.

HomeNet Thailand Brand operates based on Fair Trade principles – guaranteeing members to sell their products at a fair price; and for customers to purchase the products at a reasonable price.

HomeNet Thailand Association operates a livelihood and economic recovery fund for members of home-based workers network since 2020. The loan fund operates with free interest and charges 3% of loans per year for operating costs. The fund can be accessed by both individuals and groups in case of difficulties or need (i.e., illnesses, expenses for children's education, home repairs). The Fund was critical in supporting home-based workers, in the recovery of their business operations during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. HomeNet Thailand Association also provides welfare benefits as informal workers are not adequately covered through the formal social security system.

Societal and/or political function

HomeNet Thailand Association has campaigned for the development of policies and laws related to labour protection and social benefits for groups of informal workers. For instance, in 1997 to 2002, HomeNet Thailand Association cooperated with other informal economy

¹³https://homecarethailand.com/?fbclid=IwAR0Uc44I6WiBIFGCaHAHi_JoPuxmx43SP14DDn-EM8w7u0b9-DbfEnj9OJo

workers' networks to advocate for the National Health Security Act, which was passed into a law in November 2002. From 2002 to 2010, HomeNet Thailand Association advocated for the legislation for home-based workers, which the Parliament issued the Homeworkers Protection Act, enforced since May 2011, and extending social protection to informal workers under Section 40 of the Social Security Act 1990 in 2011. Another achievement is the Ministerial Regulation on Domestic Workers Protection enacted in 2012 and advocating for other credit schemes for livelihood development for informal workers.

Contribution to Inclusion and Access-Oriented SDG Targets

Tamsang-Tamsong and HomeNet Thailand Association practice SSE principles, namely democratic and/or participatory governance, primacy of people and social purpose over profits, and societal or political empowerment function contributing to SDG Target 1.4 by ensuring “all men and women, particularly the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services.”

Tamsang-Tamsong provides employment and income generating opportunities and fair working conditions, vulnerable groups in the society, such as women, persons with disabilities and elderly people, offering them fair compensation for their labor.

HomeNet Thailand Association started a Fund to provide financial support for members in case of difficulties (i.e., death or illnesses, home repairs, paying for children's education) or save money for a collective purchase, encouraging “formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises including access to financial services (Target 8.3).”

By having an open and voluntary membership policy, Tamsang-Tamsong and HomeNet Thailand Association can promote “social, economic and political inclusion (Target 10.2)” of all, especially vulnerable or marginalized groups in the informal economy that may be excluded from the public services.

Finally, by being governed democratically and involving stakeholders in the decision-making process, Tamsang-Tamsong and HomeNet Thailand Association contribute to ensure “responsive, inclusive, participatory, and representative decision-making (Target 16.7).” These are summarised in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 Case studies with SSE-specific features that contribute to access- and inclusion-oriented SDG targets

Access or Inclusion - oriented SDG Targets	Examples of SSE practices
<p>1.4 By 2030 ensure that all men and women, particularly the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services</p>	<p>Providing employment and income generating opportunities; fair working conditions including fair wages for delivery riders and home-based workers through collective action and mutual assistance (Tamsang-Tamsong, HomeNet Thailand Association)</p> <p>Offer higher wages for its members by charging the actual cost rather than predatory pricing compared to other platforms (Tamsang-Tamsong, Homecare Thailand)</p>
<p>8.3 Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity, and innovation, and encourage formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-</p>	<p>Provide branding, value addition, and develop new market channels (HomeNet Thailand Brand)</p> <p>Providing technology literacy, entrepreneurial skills training, and capacity development support (Tamsang- Tamsong, HomeNet Thailand Association)</p> <p>Operates a revolving Fund for its members (HomeNet Thailand Association)</p>

<p>sized enterprises including access to financial services</p>	<p>Increase members' accessibility to its social welfare scheme and social welfare provided by the government (HomeNet Thailand Association)</p>
<p>10.2 By 2030 empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status</p>	<p>Open and voluntary membership (Tamsang-Tamsong, HomeNet Thailand Association)</p>
<p>16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory, and representative decision-making at all levels</p>	<p>Promote ownership in organizational structure (Tamsang-Tamsong, HomeNet Thailand Association)</p> <p>Promote members' participation, through the election of a board, and holding regular meetings (Tamsang-Tamsong, HomeNet Thailand Association)</p>

CONCLUSION

This paper demonstrated that SSE entities are in a unique position to facilitate access and inclusion of persons, especially marginalized and vulnerable groups, by putting into practice their distinct features, namely democratic and/or participatory governance, primacy of people over capital and societal and/or political empowerment. This calls for development of policies and programmes to support SSE entities to strengthen these features, and create an environment where they can be nurtured, including through access to finance, markets, procurement, and business development services. Conventional, profit-oriented enterprises and organizations can cooperate with SSE entities or adopt the SSE features to enhance

access and greater inclusion to accelerate the achievement towards localized SDG targets.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper received inputs and contributions from Akkanut Wantanasombut, founder of Tamsang-Tamsong, and Poonsap Tulaphan from HomeNet Thailand, and was reviewed by Benjamin R. Quiñones, Jr., Denison Jayasooria and Jürgen Schwettmann.

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Building Inclusive Communities for Women Empowerment

Chapter 2

Voice, Visibility and Validity: Empowering Home-based Workers, a Case Study of HomeNet Pakistan

Ume Laila Azhar

BACKGROUND

Founded in 2005 and registered under Societies Act 1860, HomeNet Pakistan (HNP) has evolved into a dynamic network of 360 home-based worker organizations, representing 50,000 women members across 50 districts in Pakistan. Acknowledging the challenging conditions faced by 70% of home-based women workers operating in the informal sector, HNP's primary mandate is to raise awareness about their economic, social, and domestic circumstances. With a clear vision and mission, the organization has played a pivotal role in advocating for the rights and recognition of home-based workers (HBWs).

Vision: HomeNet Pakistan is a membership-based network, comprising membership-based organizations representing the majority of home-based workers across Pakistan. HomeNet Pakistan envisions a society in which home-based workers are ensured visibility, recognition, legal and social protection, and a decent standard of living.

Mission: HomeNet Pakistan, as a member of HomeNet South Asia, strives to empower home-based workers to realize their economic, political and social rights through the strengthening their respective organizations, adoption of fair trade practices, resulting in the improvement of their working and living conditions, thus ensuring that home-based workers have security of income, and participation in governance related to their concerns and livelihood.

STRATEGIC FOCUS AREAS

HomeNet Pakistan asserts that women in the informal economy deserve recognition as workers, aligning with ILO C177. To achieve this recognition, HNP advocates for skill development training, the introduction of improved technologies, access to credit schemes, effective marketing opportunities, and the implementation of trade and inclusion in labor policies. The organization strategically focuses on policy watch, advocacy and research for effective legislation, capacity and leadership development and information dissemination.

OPERATIONAL PRESENCE

Functioning both at national and provincial levels, HomeNet Pakistan is active through its District Action Committees (DACs), members, women MBOs at the grassroots level. At the national and international levels, the organization collaborates with alliances and networks to amplify its impact.

ADVOCACY AND POLICY IMPACT

With a mission to empower and strengthen home-based workers, HNP has traversed a journey spanning over eighteen years. Its primary focus has been on making home-based workers more visible, recognized, and influential stakeholders in various sectors.

One of HNP's major achievements is its role in the formation of the task forces for HBWs policy and the subsequent finalization and adoption of the HBWs policy and legislations in Sindh, Punjab, KP and Baluchistan. The inclusive approach of HNP, coupled with its presence in 25 districts, has facilitated advocacy and action, asserting for the recognition and inclusion of the informal economy.

HNP focuses on organizing and mobilizing home-based workers, recognizing the importance of statistical data in advocating for laws and policies that address the unique challenges faced by these workers, particularly women who significantly contribute to the national economy.

The journey from 2005 to 2023 reflects a significant and impactful trajectory in the realm of advocating for the rights of HBWs in Pakistan. Over the past decade, HNP has played a pivotal role in bringing visibility to the contributions of home-based workers and has successfully mobilized, organized, and advocated for their rights. The write-up highlights the key milestones, achievements, and collaborations that have shaped HNP's journey.

The key impacts of HNP, including increased participation of excluded women workers, enhanced capacity of HBWs leaders, improved networking and constructive collaboration, and increased ownership of provincial departments for HBWs policy implementation. The inclusive programmatic approach, innovative marketing opportunities, and the journey of HNP has been a remarkable one, marked by significant achievements in the realm of advocating for the rights and empowerment of HBWs.

LIVELIHOOD AND SKILL ENHANCEMENT PROGRAMS

Implementing projects aimed at enhancing the livelihoods of women, youth, and transgender individuals in the home base sector, the focus revolves around ensuring democratic and participatory approaches; advocacy for social justice and inclusion; actions towards attaining sustainability, cooperation and solidarity. Through participatory action research, the organization has developed plans and executed projects to create opportunities for vulnerable segments, such as women home-based workers, domestic workers, and youth. The paper examines the impact of these projects in terms of increased visibility, productivity, market linkages, and decent working standards for home-based workers.

HNP's efforts extend beyond advocacy, encompassing impactful livelihood initiatives. Over the years, the organization has enhanced accessibility to livelihood opportunities for women, youth, and transgender individuals. Research and needs assessment supported in development and execution of projects, creating livelihood opportunities for these vulnerable segments of society. These initiatives have not only increased productivity, market linkages, and

skills but also influenced policy frameworks for social protection and women's economic empowerment.

ESTABLISHING A STRONG ADVOCACY PLATFORM

Established with the primary goal of strengthening home-based workers and providing them with a platform to advocate for their rights, the organization has played a pivotal role in sensitizing, mobilizing, and organizing HBWs across various regions of Pakistan. Advocacy efforts, in collaboration with allies, led to the formation of high-level task forces for HBWs policy, culminating in the adoption of the HBWs and DWs policies, a significant achievement in the Asian region.

The inclusive approach of HNP, evident in its presence across 25 districts through District Advisory Committees (DACs) and HBWs groups, has contributed to its success. The support from regional networks and international organizations over the past years has further empowered HNP with enhanced capacity to lead in action-oriented initiatives, focusing on the recognition and empowerment of women in the informal economy.

INNOVATIVE APPROACHES AND COLLABORATIONS

Innovation has been a cornerstone of HNP's approach. The organization has introduced financial literacy, digital platforms for marketing opportunities and conducted skill enhancement programs, training thousands of women in product development, innovation, business management, and more. Collaborations with private sector institutions and international networks have further strengthened HNP's ability to address pressing issues, including economic empowerment, gender policies, and social protection.

The Inclusive Urban Program has been instrumental in mobilization of women clusters. The program supported the development of membership-based organizations of home-based workers in 13 cities, enhancing leadership capacities and local governance skills.

STRENGTHENING THROUGH MOBILIZATION AND ADVOCACY

The inclusive approach of advocacy and action stands as its core strength, manifesting in the mobilization and organization of HBWs into MBOs. The vertical and horizontal mobilization strategies have been instrumental in creating a cadre of empowered workers, now in the process of legal registration by the government. This bottom-up approach, rooted in gender, human rights, and labor frameworks, has enabled collective bargaining, negotiations, and formation of MBOs, unions, CBOs and cooperatives.

The vertical mobilization approach, guided by ILO C177 principles, adoption of feminist methodologies has empowered women to understand and address challenges faced while working from home. MBO leadership, emerging from this approach, has successfully expanded their membership from 10 to 100 women per group. Collective voices have brought visibility to HBWs at the local level. Simultaneously, horizontal mobilization through engagement with women-led organizations, labor unions, lawyers, media, and local departments has fostered collaboration and confidence-building through the establishment of DACs in 25 districts across Pakistan.

DACs role as catalysts for local mobilization play a pivotal role in supporting the mobilization of HBWs by breaking barriers, fostering networking, and instilling confidence in the leadership of this often-overlooked workforce. Likeminded stakeholders in DACs support MBOs' leadership in capacity development, issue advocacy at the local level, and demand legal recognition for women working in the home-based sector. Collaboration between MBOs and DACs has equipped women with advocacy tactics and strategies, empowering them to voice their demands confidently at local level.

EMPOWERING WOMEN HOME-BASED WORKERS: THE INSPIRING JOURNEY OF SADAF PARVEEN

Sadaf Parveen's journey from a woman home-based worker in Musharraf Colony, Balida Town Karachi, to a social entrepreneur is an inspiring testament to the transformative power of entrepreneurship and financial empowerment. Engaged in stones embellishment, adda

work, and embroidery for the past 10 years, Sadaf initially worked directly with garments factories in Karachi on a piece-rate basis, employing a workforce of 100-150 people on contractual terms. Her products were sold to shops in various areas of Karachi. Organized as MBO with 20 women home workers, Sadaf leadership capacity was developed through different training, sensitization sessions and focus groups on community management, leadership development and role of leaders, human rights, gender-labour frameworks, feminist methodologies, unionization, advocacy and lobbying, business management, financial and digital literacy. Along with this sensitization and study circles on different labour and gender related topics further enhanced her capacities.

The pivotal moment in Sadaf's journey occurred in 2022 when she applied for a loan and successfully received Rs. 75,000 from a microfinance bank in January 2023. This marked her transition from informal economy to formal business. Utilizing loans for purchasing raw materials from wholesale markets, Sadaf's monthly income witnessed a significant boost from sixty-five to seventy thousand rupees to one lac after utilizing the loan amount for enhancing her business, with a remarkable profit margin of around 50 %.

Financial Literacy and Training

Financial literacy training played a crucial role in Sadaf's successful transition. The training equipped her with a profound understanding of banking procedures, loan application process, and repayment mechanisms. Additionally, it enabled her to open a bank account, utilize digital apps, and access other banking facilities, including debit cards and insurance services. Sadaf is not only benefiting from these services but also guides her group members on loan utilization and dispelling misconceptions about the loaning process.

Early in her entrepreneurial journey, Sadaf received Foundation Level training on business management from HomeNet Pakistan. These sessions covered vital skills such as time management, work ethics, order tracking, business planning, and record-keeping for income and expenditures. Subsequent mentoring by HNP further sharpened her

marketing skills, customer management, and strategies for business savings and profit maximization.

Sadaf's led mobilization in Musharraf Colony steered MBOs to emerge as cooperative enterprise with ensuring democratic process and equal opportunities for all members. Community mobilization and organizing has brought women home workers to strive collectively for common economic and social aspirations. Though not yet registered, it is operating at above minimum efficient scale with monthly increase in income. Using technical skills for designing, producing, marketing the MBO are skill-driven innovations. Adopting horizontal approaches for engaging with clusters of women home workers have successfully entered into the vertical supply chains production. Being well connected with networks, organizations, markets and subcontractors continuously facilitates the members into capacity development and strengthening linkages.

Advocacy and Policy Representation

The advocacy-led trainings provided by HomeNet Pakistan empowered leaders like Sadaf to articulate their viewpoints at policy tables. Regularly attending advocacy meetings with the government of Sindh as a HBWs representative, Sadaf passionately advocates for the rights and social security of home-based workers. During a meeting with the Sindh Employees Social Security Institution (SESSI), she emphasized the need for exclusive schemes designed and developed for HBWs, stressing that existing labor laws might not adequately address their unique challenges.

In conclusion, Sadaf Parveen's journey epitomizes the potential for social and economic transformation through financial literacy, business training, and opportunities for advocacy. Her story reflects the broader impact that empowering women in the informal sector can have on individual lives and the community at large.

VOICE, VISIBILITY, AND VALIDITY: TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACT ON HOME-BASED WORKERS

Organizational Impact and International Recognition

The strategic organizing and mobilization of HBWs have created a transformative impact, exemplified by the formation of the Baldia HBWs Union in 2023, with 80 members from Mushraff Colony, Karachi. This not only bolstered the representation of women home workers at the national level but also elevated their voices to international platforms. Sadaf, now a union representative, attended a session on Business and Human Rights Due Diligence in Kathmandu, Nepal, showcasing the global reach of the organized home-based workers.

Legal Recognition and Unionization Efforts

The process has also spurred legal registration initiatives among women in the home-based sector. Sadaf's MBOs in Karachi are gearing up for legal registration under the Sindh HBWs Act 2018. The decision to seek union status has emerged democratically, indicating the empowerment of grassroots-level groups. Similar success was achieved in Lahore, highlighting the widespread impact of legal recognition efforts.

Key to Empowerment: Voice, Visibility and Validity

Sadaf Parveen's case study highlights that the key to true empowerment lies in providing women in the informal sector with the tools to secure a creditable voice, visibility, and validity. This involves a multifaceted approach, including building networks, forging partnerships, and establishing alliances that amplify the collective strength of women in informal employment.

SOCIAL SOLIDARITY ECONOMY (SSE) LENS

The SSE lens provides a comprehensive understanding of HNP's pursuit of gender equality (SDG 5) and decent employment opportunities (SDG 8). Horizontal application of the SSE framework, from mobilization to leadership development, has strategically given voice, visibility, and validity to home-based workers. The collective advocacy and inclusion efforts validate the larger agenda of

integrating hidden workers into the workforce, addressing issues like minimum wages, social security, job security, legal recognition, and digital literacy.

STRATEGIC PLANS AND METHODOLOGIES

Aligned with human rights, women, and labor frameworks, HNP's strategic plans are focused on CEDAW and ILO conventions 177, 189, 190 and SDGs frameworks. Mobilization and organizing methodologies revolve around feminist principles, emphasizing women's economic empowerment and the inclusion of marginalized communities. The strategic interventions introduce linkages development and networking to garner support and amplify voices. The inclusion of transgender individuals and persons with disabilities ensures an inclusive movement for decent work and economic empowerment.

The SDGs related monitoring frameworks by engaging the local communities through score cards exercises, further capacitated the women's groups in critically analyzing the gaps and challenges in the policy making and implementation. The community led data analysis also supported larger advocacy for localization of SDGs indicators and budgetary allocations for data collection and improving livelihoods of women in the home base sector.

ADDRESSING CHALLENGES

Working within the informal economy poses significant challenges in a context where labor issues are not prioritized by policymakers. Women's economic empowerment within the informal sector is hindered by the absence of data and statistical insights. Bridging the gap between informal sector issues and formal labor frameworks presents a tripartite mechanism challenge, with limited participation from women workers. Mobilization and organizing efforts at the grassroots level demand resources not always readily available. Mainstreaming informality issues faces hurdles due to a lack of knowledge and human resources. The disconnect between formal labor unions and federations poses a significant challenge in garnering support and spaces for informal workers. Another

important challenge is the identification and acceptance of home workers in the supply chains. Due to the capitalist powers and control over policy making, these challenges need concrete policy level solutions with participation of women engaged in the supply chains.

While substantial progress has been made, the journey towards ensuring the inclusion of HBWs and other women in the informal economy into the mainstream is still ongoing. The challenges faced by women in the informal sector necessitate a sustained and concerted effort. Recognizing the complexities of labor issues, it becomes imperative to garner support through networks, creating visibility, and amplifying the voices of women engaged in informal work.

STRATEGIC IMPERATIVES: STRENGTHENING NETWORK AND PARTNERSHIP

In the domain of labor issues, the strategic imperatives for the empowerment of women in the informal sector lie in building partnerships, establishing collective alliances, and strengthening linkages. These efforts are essential not only for the credibility of the voice of women in informality but also for ensuring their visibility and validity in broader socio-economic contexts.

MOVING FORWARD: A COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

As HomeNet Pakistan continues its mission, it recognizes the importance of collaborative efforts. Moving forward, it is a shared responsibility to ensure that the progress achieved so far serves as a foundation for even greater strides. Through sustained commitment, advocacy, and partnerships, the path to mainstreaming the informal economy becomes clearer, bringing us closer to a future where all women, regardless of their work context, can enjoy the benefits of empowerment and inclusivity.

It is important to seek support from public entities such as the National Commission on the Status of Women, Provincial Commissions on the Status of Women, National Human Rights Commission and Ombudsperson offices on workplace harassment, provincial departments of Women Development, Labor-Human

Resource Development, and Social Welfare. The ongoing struggle persists until HBWs are universally recognized as pivotal contributors to the economy. The interventions over the years have propelled HNP to lead action-oriented targets for community empowerment.

CONCLUSION: PAVING THE WAY FOR EMPOWERMENT IN THE INFORMAL SECTOR

Over two decades, HomeNet Pakistan has made significant strides in empowering thousands of home-based workers across Pakistan. Formation of networks and the emergence of women as leaders have allowed these workers to articulate and address their own issues, marking a crucial step towards the empowerment of a historically marginalized segment of the workforce. It has also led to the building of inclusive communities in the informal economy, with marginalized sectors of home workers and domestic workers accomplishing the SDGs.

The impactful journey mentioned in the case study, highlights the resilience and empowerment of home-based workers, overcoming challenges through strategic planning, legal advocacy, and international visibility. The efforts are not just about legal recognition; they signify a broader movement for dignity, inclusion, and economic empowerment. Successful implementation of projects like Organizing the Informal sector, Advocacy for HBWs, Social Protection for HBW; Organizing and Empowering the Informal Sector - Project for DWs of Islamabad Slums; Gender Equity Program, Adoption and Implementation of Home-Based Workers Policies and Laws in Punjab & Sindh; Economic Empowerment of Women Home-Based Workers and excluded Groups in Pakistan; Women Social Empowerment Programme; Empowering Youth for Employability; Influencing Home-Based Workers Policy for Women; Hidden Workers-Improving Transparency and Traceability to improve working conditions of home-based workers in apparel and footwear chain and World Class Cities for All-Inclusive Urban Planning are some of the initiatives which have promoted inclusivity and contributed to building a SDGs-centric community.

The impact of initiatives for community development is evident in the increased participation, enhanced capacity of HBWs leaders, improved networking among community members, and greater ownership of labor and human resource departments for HBWs policy implementation. The organization's inclusive programmatic approach towards women's economic empowerment, involving various vulnerable groups, focused on human rights, women-labour frameworks, driving forces from feminist methodologies, has been a defining feature of its success. Alongside the inclusion and fostering of communities working towards SDGs related objectives remains a challenge in localization of the indicators. As highlighted in the case study, building women voices for visibility and further reassuring the validity through mobilization and leadership development has been the key strategy and driving force for mitigating the challenge.

Moving forward and realigning its vision, HomeNet Pakistan focuses on emphasizing the importance of state and non-state actors in the global emancipation and empowerment of women. With investing in mobilizing communities, building alliances for joint advocacy, collaboration for capacity development; the organization remains committed to strengthen women home workers like Sadaf as pivotal contributors to the economy and strives for the swift passage of the draft bill on home-based workers into law at the provincial levels.

The journey of Sadaf Parveen is a demonstration of the transformative power of advocacy, strategic partnerships, and innovative approaches. From creating visibility for home-based workers to influencing policy frameworks and livelihood opportunities, HNP has played a crucial role in reshaping the narrative for vulnerable segments of society. As the organization looks ahead, its dedication to the empowerment of women and marginalized groups remains unwavering, poised to contribute meaningfully to the achievement of the SDGs related to gender equality and decent work.

Chapter 3

Social and Economic Empowerment of Home-based Workers through HomeNet Thailand Brand (HNTB)

Poonsap Suanmuang Tulaphan

WHO ARE HOME-BASED WORKERS?

Home-based workers are workers who use their home as their workplace. They are categorized into 2 types, own account workers and homeworkers. Own account workers are workers who produce and sell their products on their own while homeworkers are wage workers working on a piece rate basis, they will sub-contract jobs from factories or sub-contractors to work at home. In many cases, the same person may switch from working as own account worker to homemaker from time to time. They produce many kinds of products such as handicrafts, garments, leatherware, electronics, processed food, herbal products, and accessories. They are 'invisible' in the sense that they are not recognized as workers who contribute to the economic growth of the country. They are considered informal workers who are not protected by the country's labour laws. There are a few government plans and policies meant for developing their quality of life but very few of these workers can access public services.

During 2014-2016, the Foundation for Labour and Employment Promotion (FLEP) worked closely with HomeNet Thailand Association (HNTA), a membership-based organization of home-based workers, to build entrepreneurship skills and product development of its members. However, it found out that each producers' group has struggled on their own in several aspects such as production, marketing, and business management. They put lots of effort into maintaining their business activity with low business competitiveness, and they work long working hours, earning low income, and many are facing marketing problems. Even though FLEP and HNTA have

successfully advocated for co-contribution from the government in the social insurance scheme for informal workers in 2011, HNTA members still cannot pay the contribution fee continuously.

ESTABLISHING A SOCIAL ENTERPRISE TO DEAL WITH MARKETING

In more recent years, FLEP and HNTA came up with the idea of working together to overcome difficulties they were facing, especially on the marketing problem. By the end of 2016, through a consultation meeting with home-based workers' leaders and external experts, FLEP and HNTA decided to incubate an informal social enterprise to improve the livelihoods of women home-based workers.

The following seven principles were agreed upon by HNTA leaders in operating the social enterprise:

- Operate with good business outcomes, secure and sustainable. As such, members need to produce good quality and high standard products, having permanent marketing channels.
- Operate based on Fair Trade and Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) principles. It is guaranteed that the members can sell their products at a fair price. Likewise, the customers can purchase the products at a reasonable price.
- Create decent employment for vulnerable groups in the society, such as women home-based workers, people with disability, and elderly persons, offering them fair compensation for their labor.
- Promote members' participation and ownership in the organizational structure of the social enterprise.
- Increase members' accessibility to the social enterprise's mutual aid scheme as well as the social welfare scheme provided by the State.
- Sell products that are beneficial for society and the environment. For example, organic products and healthy food that are environmentally friendly.
- Operate with clear organizational structure, democratic governance, efficient management, accountability, and

transparency, partly for ease of registration of the social enterprise as a juristic person.

ESTABLISHMENT OF HOMENET THAILAND BRAND

In 2017, HomeNet Thailand Brand (HNTB) was established collectively by 942 home-based workers from 25 producers' groups who are members of HNTA. HNTB aims to increase the competitiveness of members' products to secure their income and livelihood. HNTB operates by adhering to the above mentioned seven principles. HNTB members and HNTA invested as shareholders. Six home-based worker representatives and a representative from HNTA were elected as HNTB Board members to guide and monitor overall operation. The FLEP provides support to HNTB staff who are involved in marketing and accounting. However, during 2017 to mid-2019, HNTB was not fully operational due to limitation of operating staff. It was active again from mid-2019. Unfortunately, in 2020 to 2022, Thailand was hard hit by COVID-19 pandemic. HNTB activities were forced to slow down due to the lockdown imposed by the Government, which forced marketing channels to close shop. Consequently, some of the member groups stopped working, others downsized their business operations. HNTB itself and their members faced difficulties to survive, therefore, FLEP helped them obtain emergency support from donor organizations such as Foundation Chanel, Rockefeller Foundation, and WIEGO (Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing). Small grants were allocated to 44 producer's groups to support members' business which cover about 1,000 home-based workers, 70% of whom are women. Meanwhile, HNTB itself mobilized additional investment funds to purchase members' products. FLEP also obtained support from the government emergency relief project to provide training on business management, online marketing techniques as well as development of Business Model Canvas (BMC) to members' organizations. HNTB members used this opportunity to enhance

relevant knowledge and skills for restarting their business again after the COVID-19 crisis.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, HNTB became a positive factor helping individual members to overcome trading limitations through online marketing. The HNTB staff, equipped with knowledge on communication technology, took responsibility for marketing members' products online. Since 2021, these staff have created online marketing platforms and closely coordinated with members' groups for effectively adapting themselves to make use of this new technology. In the meantime, the formal registration of HNTB was being processed during this period.

In 2023, HNTB was formally registered as a private enterprise with 72% of investment shared by home-based workers groups and 28 % of the total investment shared by HNTA. HNTB did not register as a cooperative or a social enterprise because cooperatives in Thailand are heavily controlled by the government, while under Thailand Social Enterprise law, HNTB will be allowed to register as a social enterprise after one year of implementing its business. HNTB started operating as a registered private enterprise by creating linkages with different producers' groups to develop new quality and attractively designed products,¹ while at the same time promoting equity investments among home-based workers and working out collective management. Likewise, products produced by members are harmonized with environmental conservation measures so as to contribute to sustainable development in the community and society. HNTB's marketing strategy is primarily geared towards working through FLEP and HNTA which operate both online and offline marketing channels. In 2022, HNTB's online marketing shared about 20% of the total sales. The remaining 80% of the sales were generated through a small shop

¹ <https://www.homenetthailand.org/en/products-en>

assembled in conjunction with various gatherings and social events organized by FLEP and other civil society organizations.

In 2023, HNTB gradually improved its business management and marketing channels at the same time that it encouraged its member-producer groups to gear towards full operations. HNTB shifted to wholesale marketing and branding. In mid-2023, HNTB Board decided to encourage its members to actively engage in HNTB business by sharing to the shareholders some dividends from profits gained in 2021-2022. The HNTB board decided to divide the profits gained during COVID-19 pandemic into 3 portions, 60% for dividends to shareholders, 30% as reserves for expanding the HNTB business, and 10% donation to HNTA. As a result, the existing producer members showed greater interest in increasing their investment, while new producer groups were attracted to join and invest in HNTB.

HOMENET THAILAND BRAND AS A SOCIAL SOLIDARITY ECONOMY (SSE) ORGANIZATION

HNTB engages in economic activity by adopting the concept of social solidarity economy (SSE) in its operation to serve as a collective economic unit based on the principle of interdependence among producer groups. HNTB members are able to freely practice democratic/participatory governance inasmuch as they own and manage 2 to 3 investment funds. Meanwhile, producer-members and their representatives participate in production, decision-making level, and management of the organizations. In other words, the HNTB members play three roles: they are the owner-shareholders of the social enterprise, they are also the producers/workers, and they are the managers.

The products of HNTB members are valuable: they are handmade, produced with local technical knowledge and wisdom, and infused with cultural and environmental conservation impressions (e.g., traditional hand-woven cloth with naturally dyed, rice and other

organic food products). Some are featured products with certified quality, rare even in Thailand (e.g., bronzeware). Customers will not only acquire the purchased product, they will also gain the social, cultural, and environmental values intrinsic in the product itself, at a fair price. In addition, buying products from HNTB implies contributing to job creation, support for decent work, and enhancing the sustainable development of home-based workers, especially women and elderly persons. Moreover, HNTB helps market the products of Myanmar refugees who have settled at the Thai border due to political conflict in their country.

HNTB operates based on the principle of primacy of people over profit. HNTB members earn their income by selling their product at a fair price and gain dividends from HNTB profit. However, part of the profits is donated to HNTA, which, in turn, is used for the development of the quality of life of home-based workers through organizing, supporting economic empowerment and advocacy for social protection. It is expected that the sales revenue of members will help increase their capacity to pay the contribution fee for the government's national social insurance scheme for informal workers.

However, HNTB and its members still continue to receive COVID-19 emergency funds from donor organizations, as cited above. Without this emergency support, their economic recovery may take a longer time. At this stage, HNTB still depends on FLEP support, although it has a separate legal identity from FLEP. HNTB's profits are not yet sufficient to cover personnel expenses and overhead costs. The FLEP still subsidizes the staffing costs of HNTB and pays for the premises, utilities, and communications as well. It is expected that in the long run, when consumer uptake of the products of home-based workers will have increased, they could contribute more to the FLEP and they would become independent of FLEP. When that time comes, HNTA as a home-based worker organization will keep on working without depending on any donor but rely totally on resources gained from membership fee and incomes generated from HNTB.

PROMOTION OF FEMINIST QUALITIES

The HNTB practice fully embodies the feminist qualities, primarily because it is based on the cooperation and mutual/reciprocal support among its women-members. Normally, it is not easy to bring a thousand people who are located in different areas and produce different products to come together, work hand in hand to establish and manage an enterprise collectively. Among 1,000 members of HNTB, 70% are women producers, who are the major investors and hold the majority control of the enterprise. Traditionally, it is impossible for a poor woman to own an enterprise, but with numbers, they can collectively own an enterprise.

HNTB is a tangible case of home-based women workers who, hitherto worked in the informal sector, banded together to fund and formally establish a social enterprise. Through HNTB, the transition of home-based women workers from the informal to formal economy will help increase their visibility and recognition in the society. HNTB will play a key role in enhancing their economic empowerment, and enabling their greater access to new technology and skills development. Fundamentally, when a woman has secured her economic activity, increased entrepreneurial skills, and gained regular income, her self-esteem will also be uplifted and she will earn greater recognition from family and the community. This will lead to a greater voice which will help dignify her life and transform her social status.

Participation in HNTB will, therefore, boost the livelihoods of home-based women workers and enhance gender equality in the society. Inasmuch as HNTB operates as a fair-trade enterprise and produces eco-friendly products, its practices and activities are naturally imbued with feminist qualities such as altruism, care & concern for others, empathy and compassion. The home-based workers truly care for and are concerned about the welfare not only of their customers' but also the environment and ecosystem. Being sympathetic to other home-based women workers in Thailand, HNTB allowed new producers' groups who are not shareholders of HNTB to participate in their trade fair. They eventually gained trust of HNTB and joined the organization as new members. HNTB also showed compassion and generosity to

Myanmar migrants settled at the Thai border, by offering to sell their products so that they may also benefit from the services of HNTB.

TOWARDS FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

As mentioned, the operating fund of HNTB comes from 3 financial sources: the shareholders, the FLEP and emergency fund granted by donor agencies. The full operating fund is estimated to be around THB 1 million, of which shareholders contributed around 40%, FLEP 40%, and donors 20%. Moreover, HNTB itself generates funds from trading profits. The equity investments of HNTB shareholders and the reserve funds retained earnings are internal funds or self-generated funds of HNTB.

Ideally, the amount of money from the two sources - equity investments and trading profits - should be sufficient to support the operations of HNTB business. However, this is not the case. Still operating as a start-up, HNTB requires external funding support. FLEP has come forward to provide in-kind contributions in terms of operations staff. In addition, FLEP also bears the overhead costs (premise, electricity, internet, telephone, and utility costs), with the support of donors in the form of emergency funds. It should be possible for HNTB to gradually make a profit and cover its administrative and operating costs within the next 5 years when the economic situation in Thailand improves. In the meantime, HNTB should strive to raise more funds, improve the quality of the products of home-based women workers, increase its sales volume, and gain more market share.

CONTRIBUTION TO DECENT WORK AND THE SDGs

From the financial aspect, HNTB may hardly self-sustain in a short period or can collapse if it will not get financial support as needed. Why do donors and the government need to support HNTB? It is a private enterprise, isn't it? The enterprise needs to mind its own business, right? While HNTB plans to register as a social enterprise in a few years, the relevant issue that persists is "why it is essential for donors and the government to support the home-based workers".

Without any doubt, HNTB is helping create jobs and decent work for home-based workers, especially the marginalized women. HNTB facilitates the formalization of the work of home-based workers by virtue of its being registered as an enterprise under the supervision of the government. It is subject to tax and gains visibility, validity, and recognition by society. The impact of HNTB business is unquestionably authentic contributions to GDP, the SDGs and the country's economic growth. HNTB's enterprise helps create fair employment, upholds the workers' fundamental rights at work, and increases the productivity of community enterprises. When the women workers earn regular income, they will have the means to access the government's social insurance scheme. As an entity with legal personality, HNTB has the capacity to engage in social dialogue with the government and the customers.

HNTB does contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). *Firstly, SDG 1 on no poverty:* HNTB endeavors to increase the competitiveness of the products of its members who are home-based workers with vulnerable working conditions, thus enabling them to earn an income and fight poverty. *Secondly, SDG 5 on gender equality:* HNTB promotes cooperation, mutual assistance, and generosity among its members, to the extent that HNTB has been able to extend help to Myanmar migrants to sell their products and earn an income too. HNTB has also enjoined other marginalized women workers to start their own enterprises and to join HNTB as members. In this manner, HNTB has empowered home-based women workers, improved their economic standing, and enabled these hitherto unrecognized and unappreciated women to gain visibility and recognition in society. *Thirdly, SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth:* the economic contributions of HNTB are well established and reported above. *Fourthly, SDG 10 on reduced inequalities:* the work of HNTB among home-based women workers is of great significance in reducing social inequality, considering the high rate of social inequality in Thai society. The number of women workers who have insecure lives in Thailand is enormous, hence, the country can't claim that it has sustainable development. The experiences of HNTB in boosting the productivity of home-based workers groups and reducing social

inequality among them can be adopted by the government and applied on a nationwide scale. In this manner, the number of social enterprises will increase, development of communities will become more sustainable, and more people can get involved in the process of achieving the sustainable development goals.

CONCLUSION

Establishment and strengthening Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) in Thailand can be achieved by replicating the example of HNTB among marginalized people, especially women, in local communities. There are already quite a huge number of community-based organizations in local communities that can be tapped for this purpose. What needs to be done is to promote the SSE values and principles among these organizations, such as cooperation and mutuality, economic empowerment, increasing gender equality, promoting decent work, enhancing participatory governance of community-based organizations, while at the same time strengthening their entrepreneurial capabilities.

As a result, women-led enterprises will contribute to harmony and peace, and maintain a good environment and ecosystem for our children's future. This is not an easy task. As shown in the case of HNTB, financial self-sufficiency is still a bottleneck that stifles the operation and growth of the company. The HNTB Board are elected from home-based workers leaders who have low or moderate knowledge and skill in business management. Therefore, their knowledge and entrepreneurial and managerial skills need to be capacitated. Otherwise, how can they control and give guidance to the operating staff to accomplish their goals? At the same time, the characteristics of social and business activities are different, how can they balance between the goal of financial self-sufficiency and the pursuit of social and environmental mission? Moreover, there is the technology disruption and multi-crisis that confronts the HNTB members in their attempt to adapt in a changing world.

These are issues and questions HNTB as an SSE organization needs to answer and overcome, if it were to achieve financial self-sufficiency

and become an effective SSE role model for others to follow. To become a successful SSE organization, it will take time, patience, and commitment from HNTB stakeholders. Toward an inclusive community and sustainable development, HNTB must use the SSE principles as guidance to monitor and develop its organization periodically. At the same time, HNTB needs to engage with other key players in society including the government, customers, private sector, and charity donors with the view of making them understand the potential of SSE in uplifting the lives and livelihoods of the marginalized and vulnerable communities, and thus accelerating progress towards the achievement of the SDGs.

Chapter 4

Towards the Economic Empowerment of Women Home-based Workers: The Story of HomeNet Producers Cooperative, Philippines

Maria Patricia de Vera and Rosalinda Pineda Ofreneo

ABSTRACT

This paper is about the HomeNet Producers Cooperative (HPC) which was officially registered with the Cooperatives Development Authority (CDA) in 2012, on the initiative of women home-based workers who up to now comprise 70% of its membership (the other 30% is composed of professionals and gender advocates who share the HPC's vision, mission, and goals). Its practice is generally aligned with ASEC's five dimensions of SSE, and ILO's core features of SSE, which will be further analyzed in the paper through a more detailed examination of its documents and operations. The feminist nature of HPC is apparent in its overwhelmingly female membership, and the leading role of feminists in the organization who see the HPC as a potent instrument for women's economic empowerment, and adhere to the tenets of Gender and Development. Although HPC relies mainly on volunteerism and does not directly employ paid staff, it contributes to decent work by providing a stable market and income for producer groups with employees who supply the coop. The HPC is also guided by the SDGs, and many of its activities are in support of these goals as will be elaborated in the paper. The HPC's financing approach will also be analyzed in terms of membership contributions, donations, government support, and the projected financial advantages of its conversion into a multi-purpose cooperative with credit and marketing facilities. Now that we are living in the age of digitalization, HPC also confronts challenges related to the increasing use of online platforms and the need to level up beyond its brick-and-mortar store to take advantage of new technologies.

BACKGROUND

The HomeNet Producers Cooperative (HPC) was officially registered with the Cooperatives Development Authority (CDA) in 2012, on the initiative of women home-based workers who up to now comprise at least 70% of its membership (the other 30% is composed of allies from the academia, non-governmental organizations and the private sector who share the HPC's vision, mission, and goals) coming from different parts of the three main islands of the Philippines, namely Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao). Together, the members pursue the advocacy to better the lives of home-based workers and informal workers/producers by taking action on product development, promotion, and sales. The members also reach out to other cooperatives for collaborative endeavors which are mutually beneficial to all parties concerned.

Someone once said that if we desire to make a bad system obsolete, do not fight it, instead, model an alternative system. That is how HPC came to appreciate social solidarity economy or SSE. It comes as an alternative pathway to the dominant profit-oriented system prevailing in the economic world order.

HPC is fortunate to have been introduced to SSE by Dr. Benjamin Quiñones, the founder of Asian Solidarity Economy Council or ASEC. HomeNet Philippines, to which HPC is affiliated, initiated the formation of an SSE pool of trainers. The first activity was the conduct of a Youth Entrepreneurship Program (YEP) held in mid-2021, for which a training manual was developed. Five HPC members, including this writer, were included in the group. A trainers training on SSE was held in 2022. It focused on SSE social enterprise development or SSE SED. The SSE trainers proceeded to conduct three SSE SED regional trainers training in the island of Luzon: (1) National Capital Region (NCR); (2) Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, and Quezon (CaLaBaRZon) Region; and, (3) Central Luzon Region.

Through a separate initiative, five HPC leaders underwent the online training course on SSE as an alternative pathway to sustainable

development run by ASEC and the University of the Philippines Center for Women's and Gender Studies in early 2023.

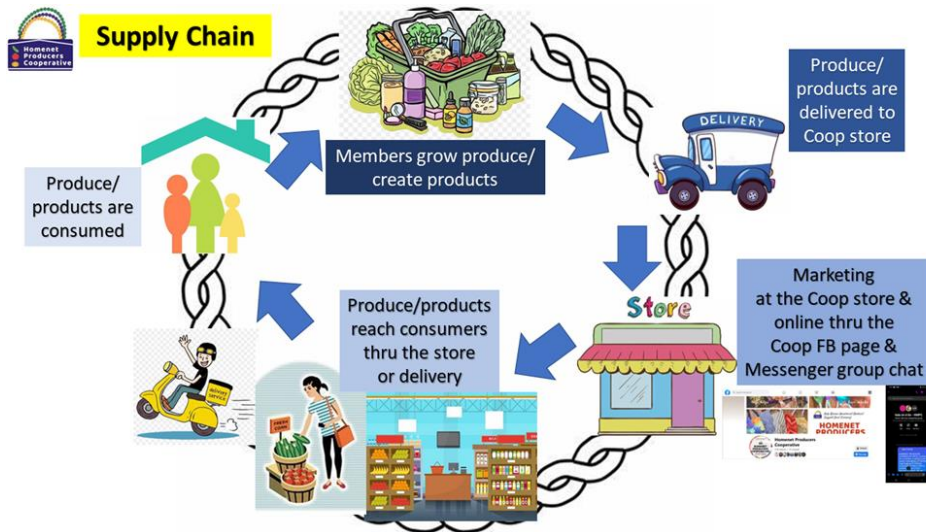


Figure 4.1 HPC's Supply Chain

As a SSE entity, the HPC has developed its supply chain as illustrated in Figure 4.1 and described below:

The HPC supply chain starts and ends with the 70% cooperative members, the home-based workers (HBW), who are themselves the producers of food and non-food products and services. Each HBW's social enterprise has its own supply chain. But we will not dwell into the specifics of that. For the HPC supply chain, the producers work on their respective products upon receipt of a purchase order from the HPC general manager. The purchase order can be of two kinds: (1) an order to replenish saleable items; (2) an order made by loyal cooperative consumers who are either cooperative members or non-members. The HBW confirms the order. Production takes place or if their stocks can fulfill the order immediately, then the next step in the supply chain begins.

The ordered products reach the cooperative store either through personal delivery by the concerned HBW, or through someone who

has a schedule to visit the cooperative store as this would cut on cost, or through commercial courier such as Lalamove, the cost of which is shouldered by the producer. The products are displayed at the cooperative store shelves and stocks are kept in cabinets. Through various social media platforms, the products are promoted. Loyal consumers help in spreading the word.

The consumers are mainly cooperative members and non-members who are the members' family, relatives, friends, colleagues, and even acquaintances. They patronize mostly food products. Occasionally, non-food products are bought as gifts or tokens. People's organizations buy the cooperative products which are needed during relief operations in disaster-affected communities.

SSE CORE FEATURES

Engaged in Economic Activities

As a producer cooperative, the principal activity of the organization is carried out by its members who are engaged in the production of food and food products, crafts, wearables, novelty items, accessories, home care products. To pursue its social and environmental mission, the HPC also practises community-supported and shared agriculture, whereby it purchases organic vegetables, eggs, fruits, and other healthy and sustainably-produced products and sells them to its clients.

Income of the organization is derived principally from its sale of home-based worker products, seafood products provided by the Philippine Fisheries Development Authority (PFDA) through a program conducted in cooperation with the CDA, and the safe and healthy produce of suppliers cultivated through time, mainly women social entrepreneurs and women-led group enterprises. It also receives donations from members who decide to forego their interest on share capital and patronage refund (ISCPR). Lately it received a grant from a big coop (USSC) through the Big Brother/Sister Program of the CDA to refurbish its store and office.

The HPC is able to generate a small surplus every year, and this is divided based on the provisions of its bylaws. (See section on financing approach).

Primacy of People over Profit

Being a cooperative, the HPC adheres to the principle of service over and above profit. This is explicitly stated in Article IX (on Operations), Section 58 on Primary Consideration. Its Vision, Mission, and Goal, crafted through a workshop of its members, reflect its social and environmental considerations:

Vision: Sustainable well-being of home-based workers in a just and peaceful world governed by solidarity.

Mission: To provide the best services to increase productivity through maximum use of resources for profitability as well as the benefit of people and the planet while promoting peace and partnership.

Goal: To provide appropriate support to enhance each other's abilities and to develop the ability of product creators to suit consumers so that the quality can meet the local, national, and global markets, and provide benefits to their members, society, and the environment.

As a cooperative governed by rules provided by law and by issuances of the CDA, the HPC Bylaws provide for specific allocations for education and community development (please see section on financing), but admittedly it is little.

Contribution to Decent Work and the SDGs

As set forth by the HPC in its proposed amendments to its bylaws, the objectives of the envisioned HomeNet Multi-Purpose Cooperative, includes the following;

- To promote and advocate cooperativism, solidarity-based and gender-responsive social and group enterprises through socially-oriented projects, education and training, research and communication;

- To provide goods and services to its members to enable them to attain increased income, savings, investments, productivity and purchasing power, and promote among themselves equitable distribution of net surplus through maximum utilization of economies of scale, cost-sharing and risk-sharing;
- To undertake the production and processing of raw materials or goods produced by its members into finished or processed products for sale by the cooperative to its members and non-members;
- To procure and distribute commodities to consumers, both members and non-members;
- To engage in the supply of production inputs to members and market their products;
- To develop skills and expertise among its members, particularly in cooperative practices, business development, e-marketing and other uses of digital technology, and thereby advance their educational, economic, and social status;
- To facilitate access to and control over productive resources by home-based and other informal workers, as well as other low-income and less privileged groups, especially those who become HMPC members;
- To develop a dynamic savings mobilization and capital build-up scheme to extend credit for productive and provident purposes, sustain its developmental activities and long-term investments, thereby ensuring optimum economic benefits to its members, their families, organizations and communities; and
- To promote and facilitate access to social protection of HMPC members, organizations, and communities.

In the process of its conversion into a multi-purpose cooperative, it is now developing its capacity to also fulfill the other objectives set forth above, which can be classified under specific SDG goals, particularly the following:

- SDG 3 Good health and well-being through marketing safe and healthy food
- SDG 5 Gender equality through women's engagement and leadership
- SDG 8 Decent work because its main constituencies are home-based and other informal workers
- SDG 13 Climate action by supporting organic agricultural products, promoting Bokashi (from kitchen waste to compost)
- SDG 17 Partnership, by cultivating relations with CDA, PFDA, other coops, women's rights organizations, Bayan Academy, National Social Enterprise Development Roadmap (NSEDR), among many others

Although HPC relies mainly on volunteerism and does not directly employ paid staff, it contributes to decent work by providing a stable market and income for producer groups with employees who supply the coop.

As part of HomeNet Philippines and other HomeNet umbrella organizations at the regional and global levels, HPC promotes employment creation, social protection, rights at work that reflect international labor standards, and social dialogue through various campaigns, awareness-raising activities, and participation in research on these pillars. Through these activities, HPC facilitates the transition from informal to formal economy.

Mutual Aid

HPC conducts relief operations for communities affected by disasters where members are located. It is moved by values of *bayanihan*, *damayan*, *tangkilikan*, which spur members to lend each other a helping hand when needed, under normal circumstances or during emergency or disaster situations. The management is quick to respond to calls for help and assistance. It mobilizes people and resources to collectively raise relief goods for distribution to affected members and their families.

Voluntary Cooperation

Membership in the organization is open to any Filipino, of legal age, with capacity to contract, and willing to fulfill other requirements as laid down in the HPC values. Members join the organization voluntarily and can terminate membership by giving one-month notice to the Board of Directors. Members participate in its activities on their own volition; they supply the coop with goods to sell, participate in trade fairs and bazaars to help market its products, and improve its physical and online presence. They also voluntarily contribute to relief operations for communities affected by disasters.

The HPC leaders believe that building friendships and close relationships among members are important for team-building, cooperation, and harmony.

Democratic and/or Participatory Governance

The HPC is a membership-based organization, meaning its members hold the power to decide on organizational matters and elect their leaders (one person, one vote). Its common bond of membership is occupational, meaning that home-based workers are its prime constituency. Members hold an annual General Assembly, elect a Board of Directors and mandatory committees (Audit, Elections) and comprise other Committees (Membership and Education, Mediation and Conciliation, GAD, Ethics). During the General Assembly, the officers of the HPC present their respective annual reports, including the financial report audited by an external auditor.

Regular meetings of the Board of Directors are held every month, and minutes and resolutions are available and filed for transparency purposes. Members contribute shares up to a certain limit (Php12,500) so that no one member is able to get a lion's share of interest on share capital. Members decide what to do with their interest on share capital and patronage refund or IS CPR.

Autonomy and Independence

The HPC adheres to its constitution and bylaws which ensures its autonomy and independence from government, and bigger CSO

entities. The HPC, although it tries its best to adhere to the often very stringent reporting and other requirements of the CDA, is not dependent or beholden to it or any other government body.

FEMINIST QUALITIES OF THE ORGANIZATION

The HPC is moved by indigenous values of *bayanihan*, *damayan*, *tangkilian* associated with Filipino SSE entities, which spur members to lend each other a helping hand when needed.

Aside from adhering to these indigenous values which arguably can also be described as feminist, the feminist nature of HPC is apparent in its overwhelmingly female membership, and the leading role of feminists in the organization who see the HPC as a potent instrument for women's economic empowerment, and adhere to the tenets of Gender and Development (GAD). The HPC has a gender and development (GAD) Plan and a Social Development Plan required by the CDA. These plans, when implemented, show concretely the following feminist qualities of the HPC leadership and membership:

Empathy

The HPC leaders immediately express sympathy to families of members who passed away and turn over to them, without necessity of demand, the share capital of the deceased members. When a board member passed away, the HPC leadership posted a tribute to her through Facebook and made sure that HPC members attended her wake and burial. When a member got stricken with Parkinson's disease, the HPC leadership made sure that she was visited and received her share capital back to help her defray her medical treatment costs.

Altruism, Care, and Concern for Others

When fellow coops need markets for overflow products such as squash, the HPC buys and sells their products in its store, donates them to community pantries, or forwards them to communities which can buy these products cheaply. The same concern was shown when women onion producers asked for help to market their

products, and the HPC agreed to sell 750 kilos to its members and networks.

When COVID-19 struck and UP community residents were billeted in what used to be a student dorm, HPC sewer members produced bed sheets, pillow cases and other linens donated to the dorm in cooperation with the Soroptimist International QC (SIQC). Networking with the SIQC also extended to providing financial literacy and business development training to its adopted low-income community of women in Quezon City.

Nurturing

The organization helps or encourages the development of others especially home-based worker leaders and members who seldom have the opportunity to attend important conferences and meetings. Their participation is subsidized by the HPC or by HomeNet Philippines, where coop leaders are also in decision-making positions. Some of our members participated in the trade fair and fashion show in November 2023, conducted by HomeNet Southeast Asia in the Farmers' Plaza in QC through the intervention of HPC leaders.

Home-based worker leaders also participated in coop-sponsored study visits to model community garden and waste recycling facilities in Barangay Holy Spirit and to tourist-cum-learning spots in the province of Rizal; e.g., the windmills showcasing renewable energy, bamboo-based nursery and restaurant, and flower gardens that could be replicated in other places.

Potential youth leaders who could later be members of the coop underwent a youth entrepreneurship program (YEP) through coop leaders who also served as trainers and links to ASEC who developed the training program.

The coop also purchases the products in advance, for example, from senior citizens who make attractive beaded wall clocks and wall décor. In Angono, a coop member led in the production of hand-painted shawls and employed persons with disabilities and cancer survivors.

Cooperation, Unity/Harmony

The HPC promotes working or acting together among members for a common purpose or benefit. This was shown in projects like “Share Your Blessings” where coop members donated pre-loved items for the use of others (coop members and non-members) and helped in sorting them out for distribution to communities in need.

Reciprocity/Mutuality

All members are enjoined to get involved in mutual aid activities to help disaster-stricken members, those who are hospitalized or bereaved. When opportunities for marketing are offered, this is shared with all those who have products.

The COVID-19 situation also opened up chances for producer groups to sell face masks, hand sanitizers and other products distributed to HomeNet Philippines communities.

Generosity

The organisation gives cash and relief items to victims of calamities/disasters once it is informed of the events and the survivors ask for assistance.

ANALYSIS OF THE CASE STUDY

Analysis of the SSE core features

The HPC manifests all but one of the SSE core features to a great extent. However, the core feature centering on contributions to decent work and the SDGs need more attention and development. (Please see the following section on decent work and SDGs). The HPC as of now, relies on volunteerism, and has no direct employees. This should be a goal for the future, when it converts itself into a multi-purpose cooperative and consequently, will have the means to create employment and provide the required social protection benefits.

Analysis of the feminist qualities of SSE entities

These qualities are very strong and spring partly from indigenous Filipino values associated with SSE entities. The HPC has a very visible and influential feminist leadership. It also benefits from the presence

of an active GAD committee which has done awareness-raising activities on feminist SSE online, and has developed a GAD plan for implementation.

Analysis of the financing approach

The HPC is a primary cooperative whose main function is production and marketing of the goods produced by its members. Under the rules prescribed by law and policies laid down by the Cooperatives Development Authority (CDA), the HPC cannot embark on a savings and credit program unless it converts itself into a multi-purpose cooperative, a process which is already being followed.

Currently, the HPC relies on membership contributions in the form of share capital. This fund is used to purchase goods from home-based producers who are members of the cooperative. It is also used to cover the purchase of seafood products delivered by the Philippine Fisheries Development Authority (PFDA) through the Isda-on-Go program conducted in cooperation with the CDA, and for which the HPC received a big freezer for free. Some members supply the cooperative with goods purchased from other cooperatives, group and social enterprises, individual social entrepreneurs, organic vegetable and egg producers. The cooperative sells these products, and receives a minimum of 5% sales commission from the purchases; the balance of the surplus is used to provide small allowances to a bookkeeper and part-time sellers.

The advantage of the HPC's dominant self-finance approach is that it relies on the strength of its leadership and membership in mobilizing resources for its principal activity. The disadvantage is that the net surplus generated through this approach is quite limited, and results in very small interest on share capital and patronage refund (ISCPR), which is computed after subtracting the 10% reserve fund, 10% education fund, 3% community development fund, and 7% optional fund (for land and building development). The good news is that the majority of those who receive ISCPR decide to donate the amount to the coop, or add it to their share capital. Since the education and social development fund is contingent on the size of the net surplus

generated (10% for education and 3% for community development), the activities conducted under these categories are also necessarily limited.

Lately, the HPC became part of the Koop Kapatid (Big Brother/Sister) Program of the CDA, and received a Php50,000 grant from the USSC Cooperative to purchase equipment, build storage facilities, repaint and refurbish its store and office premises. It also underwent a process of accreditation by the CDA to enable it to receive government funds under the SARA Program which is meant for livelihood recovery and business development of HPC members who are part of home-based producer groups affected by typhoons and other disasters. The HPC developed a proposal for a Php50,000 grant for its members in two towns of Bataan province affected by Typhoon Egay.

To strengthen the funding of HPC's activities, a practical way is to motivate members to complete their subscribed capital, or at least meet the Php4,000 minimum share capital. The conversion of HPC to a multi-purpose cooperative will lead to its building of a savings and lending program that is envisioned to increase its financial capacity considerably. Developing partnerships with big cooperatives and government agencies has proven to be quite fruitful, and can be continued with greater vigor.

Analysis of the contributions to Decent Work and the SDGs

Contributions to certain SDGs are evident, but need to be upscaled to create direct employment with social protection.

In the context of the SDGs, the HPC can be considered an "inclusive community" of home-based and other informal workers where they are enabled to produce and market their products, and in the future, engage in savings, credit, and other activities that can accelerate the economic and social development of their "communities of origin." Informal workers are often invisible and marginalized, and seldom considered a part of the mainstream economy. The HPC heightens their presence and includes them in activities which give them recognition, if not representation.

The HPC has been witness to successful initiatives that promote inclusiveness in communities where its leaders and members are active. A prime example which has been shared in many ASEC and other international webinars is that of the community housing, garden, and kitchen in Angono, Rizal. Despite initial challenges such as the lack of awareness and resources, this initiative was successful because of effective organizing, awareness-raising, advocacy, and networking by leaders and members of the PATAMABA Housing Association (HOA) and the PATAMABA Workers in the Informal Sector Enterprise (WISE). The partnership of many stakeholders - workers, women's groups and other civil society organizations, local government units, national government agencies, academe, and the private sector was crucial in the success of the initiative. Documentation and presentation of these initiatives in many publications, meetings, and conferences, have encouraged the building of similar partnerships not only in the Philippines but also in the sub-region.

The town of Angono is also considered the art capital of the Philippines, and many of its producers are also artists producing jewelry and jewelry boxes, picture frames, shawls, and novelty items. Home-based workers mounted a trade fair and fashion show at the subregional workshop held in the area, which was replicated recently in Quezon City.

Fostering artistry and creativity is an innovative approach that other SSE entities wishing to achieve the SDGs can employ. Examples of these are: harnessing the unique and attractive potential of indigenous design (as in the more than 50-year old enterprise, Pinangga, producing embroidered wear), mounting "fashion shows" by normally marginalized producers who model their wares to attract more buyers, doing intricate bead work to produce attractive wall clocks and wall frames, and recycling (upcycling) waste products like cheese cloth that used to contain flour for a bakery, into uniquely designed bags (sewn by home-based workers) that appeal to artists and environmentalists.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Although HPC strongly manifests all but one of the core features of SSE, it confronts many challenges. One challenge is the geographic spread (not territory-based, and not confined to a specific locality because the bond of membership is occupation-based). Consequently, face-to face interaction is limited, a constraint partly cured by online or hybrid meetings and assemblies.

Another big challenge is the aging leadership; there is a need to develop second-liners, and recruit youths who are “digital natives” and adept at using new technology for economic activities.

Resource constraints limit the HPC operations, mainly because as a primary cooperative it can do only its principal operation: facilitating the production and marketing of home-based workers’ products. It also cannot hire direct employees and relies mainly on volunteerism.

HPC hopes to overcome these challenges through the following strategies:

- Conversion into a multi-purpose cooperative
- Building multi-stakeholder partnerships with GOs (e.g., CDA), other coops (as suppliers and “big brothers”), informal workers associations, women’s rights and other civil society organizations, private sector, academia, etc.
- More intensive use of digital platforms, social media
- Recruitment and development of young leaders who are adept at using new technology.

Chapter 5

Inclusive Development of Vulnerable Women via Social Solidarity Economy in India

Kumar Loganathan

INTRODUCTION

The recent global economic and political instability has served to underline the shortcomings of our current development system and further confirm the necessity for an alternative or complementary development paradigm. The Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) is considered as a viable solution to re-balancing economic, social and environmental objectives.

SSE is an ethical and values-based approach to economic development that prioritizes the welfare of people and planet, over profits and blind growth. The other feature that distinguishes SSE entities from other enterprises is the participatory and democratic nature of governance in decision-making processes.

The recognition for SSE is growing world-wide after the UN General Assembly adoption of the resolution “Promoting the Social and Solidarity Economy for Sustainable Development” at its 66th plenary meeting on 18 April 2023. The resolution acknowledges that SSE can contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The UN Resolution also emphasizes the contribution of SSE to decent work, the promotion of international labor standards and fundamental rights at work, poverty alleviation, and social transformation and inclusion.

There are successful SSE entities around the world in promoting livelihoods and job creation in the fight against poverty. SSE entities

offer an important source of employment in the face of global unemployment and underemployment challenges.

The present paper illustrates one such SSE-based organization, which has been successfully involved in inclusive development of vulnerable women in rural India, for more than two decades, and contributes to the SDGs.

The Association for Sarva Seva Farms, or ASSEFA for short, is a Gandhian Organization that has been working for the development of the rural people for the last fifty-five years. It was started as a second phase of the Bhoodan movement (Land gift movement).¹ The initial noble mission of ASSEFA was to develop the waste and surplus ceiling lands to settle the landless farmers. Gradually, it started to work for the welfare of other rural people including women, children, other farmers and rural artisans.

In the 1980s, ASSEFA introduced a social platform, “women self-help groups” as a tool to address the challenges confronting the women. During that period, participation of women in the social get-together/action was restricted for various reasons.

The interaction of women was limited to their family and close relatives. The literacy rate was poor, it was less than 10% in the rural areas. Women had also limited access to earning of income as well as knowledge on their health care. Thus, women depended on men throughout their life cycle, which led to their exploitation by men in some cases.

The establishment of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) gave new energy and self-confidence to these women. Gradually, they were able to discuss, share resources, and solve their problems. The SHGs initiated regular

¹ Bhoodan Movement known as Land Gift Movement was initiated by Gandhian Vinoba Bhave in 1951. The movement attempted to persuade wealthy landowners to voluntarily give a percentage of their land to landless people. This movement went on for 13 years during which time Bhave collected 4.4 million acres of land across India to be distributed to landless farmers.

savings and thrifts among the members, which enabled them to borrow money as and when needed.

In the 1990s, when the IFAD (International Fund for Agriculture Development)-sponsored women development program was introduced through the Tamil Nadu state government, ASSEFA was included as the main implementation partner.

Under this program, ASSEFA facilitated the formation of thousands of women SHGs in 14 districts (60% of total districts in Tamil Nadu). ASSEFA conducted training of SHG members, promoted savings and thrift among them, and facilitated institutional and financial linkages with nationalized banks for credit access.

When the IFAD program ended in 1999, ASSEFA federated these vibrant women SHGs in each block and registered the federation as Mutual Benefit Trust (MBTs). The elected members of SHGs at the cluster level have become the Board of Trustees of the MBT.

To date, 87 MBTs have been established in Tamil Nadu. These MBTs have been actively functioning in the last twenty-three years with the core objective of empowering its members with suitable programs. The approach and the programs of MBT have the features of the core principles of social and solidarity economy.

To illustrate the experience of the MBTs, the author chose one MBT, "Sarvodaya Mutual Benefit Trust," located in Kariyapatti, a backward area located in Virudhunagar district of Tamil Nadu. It was established in 2003 with 235 SHGs as members, covering 3,237 women.

SSE PRINCIPLES IN MBT APPROACH

The values and principles of SSE are expressed and exhibited through certain normative core features. These are: a) Engagement in economic activities (production or services or both), b) Primacy of people over capital and profit, c) Contribution to decent work and the SDGs, d) Mutual aid, e) Voluntary cooperation, f) Democratic / participatory governance and g) Autonomy and independence.

The above core features of SSE are observed to be present in the practices and activities of the Sarvodaya MBT (heretofore referred to as the "MBT").

Engaged in Economic Activities

Enabling the women to earn income is one of the key parameters in empowering them. Once the women start to earn, their dependency on men gradually decreases. They can decide how to use their income and prioritise their expenses. Generally, women prefer to invest their income for their children, especially in good education, gold ornaments for their daughters and health care. They also prefer to support their husbands in livelihood related activities, in buying /leasing lands for agriculture purposes and more.

The MBT has been providing timely "development credit" to its members for suitable livelihood activities. The financial support is meant for both start-up enterprises and scaling-up enterprises. Depending on the needs of the enterprise and an assessment of its business potential, credit up to Rs 100,000² can be provided. The most preferred economic activities are goat rearing, dairy, agriculture farming, petty trade, mini restaurant, and garment stitching.

In addition, the MBT links its members with social entrepreneurs, wherever possible, for marketing purposes. For instance, dairy farmers are linked with dairy companies to market their surplus milk production. The dairy company is also encouraged to support the farmers with training, supply of balanced feed and veterinary care for the cows to increase the quality and quantity of milk.

During the financial year 2022-23, the MBT delivered credit amounting to Rs 64.35 million to 1,780 members, and earned a surplus of Rs. 3.4 million.

² 1 USD = 80 Rupees (Rs)

Primacy of People over Capital and Profit

The MBT's priority is to invest its profit to support its members both with financial as well as non-financial services. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the MBT supported its members - especially the vulnerables such as the widows, destitute and deserted ladies, and the aged with cooked food - with cash to meet their emergency needs, protective masks, and immunity boosters from homeopathy medicines.

A survey in one of the clusters in Kariyatti showed that the vulnerables constituted nearly 27% of the MBT members. They were mostly involved in labor work. Due to the uncertainty of getting regular work, they struggled to feed their children even a meal a day.

In order to ensure their access to healthy food, MBT entered into an arrangement with ASSEFA Food Mart whereby vulnerable members can buy healthy food regularly from the ASSEFA Food Mart under a BUY NOW-PAY LATER scheme. The MBT gives assurances to the ASSEFA Food Mart of paying for the unpaid value of food obtained by the vulnerable families.

Further, the MBT provides social security to its members such as wage loss compensation for pregnant ladies and life loss compensation to girl children when the members die. The MBT addresses the issue of dowry by arranging free mass wedding. Recently, all MBTs together organized a mass wedding for 108 couples in Kariyapatti area. The bride and bridegrooms were selected based on socio-economic conditions such as economically vulnerable, single parent or orphan, and physically challenged. The entire cost of the mass wedding was covered by the MBTs through locally mobilized donations.

The other area where members meet with unexpected expenditure is on health. During health-related emergencies, the members borrow money from the private moneylenders at exorbitant interest rates. Many families struggle to repay.

The MBT has been addressing the health-related challenges by enrolling the members with Government-sponsored health insurance coverage. In addition, the MBT organizes free health camps for general or eye checkup twice a year in collaboration with sympathetic hospitals. The chronically ill patients are treated free of cost.

The Kariyapatti area is prone to waterborne diseases. The MBT addresses this challenge by installing community RO (reverse osmosis) booster pumps to supply safe potable drinking water. The MBT in Kariyapatti has installed six booster pumps so far to provide safe drinking water to nearly 2,000 families at an affordable price. Water at the cost of Rs 20.00 per liter is sold at Rs 5.00 per liter. The income from the RO booster pump is used mainly to cover operating costs.

Contribution to Decent Work and the SDGs

While addressing the challenges of the rural women, the MBT enables their members to have a decent life. Simultaneously, it contributes to achieving the following Sustainable Development Goals:

- SDG 1 - No Poverty
- SDG 2 - Zero Hunger
- SDG 3 - Good Health and Well-being
- SDG 5 - Gender Equality
- SDG 6 - Clean water and sanitation
- SDG 8 - Decent work and Economic Growth, and
- SDG 16 - Peace, Justice and Strong institutions

Mutual Aid

Mutual aid is a part of the MBT which supports its members in accordance with the necessity and emergency as follows:

- *Wage loss compensation* is provided to the pregnant ladies during the advanced stage of pregnancy.
- *Life loss compensation* is provided to the girl children when the member dies.
- *Free mass weddings* for couples from the economically and socially vulnerable families. The couples are also provided

with 2g worth of gold thirumangalyam (ceremonial ornament), new wedding dress, 32 gift items and tailoring machine or heifer calves.

- *Emergency assistance*, for example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, women-headed vulnerable families were supported with food provisions as well as cash to meet health-related emergencies.
- *Food security*, for instance, vulnerable families are linked with ASSEFA Food Mart to buy healthy food provisions on a regular basis under the BUY NOW-PAY LATER scheme. If any of its members cannot afford to pay, the MBT will liquidate the unpaid amount.

Voluntary Cooperation

The MBT is the federation of the women SHGs in Kariyapatti area. Membership of SHGs in the federation is voluntary. Even during the process of promoting the establishment of MBTs, ASSEFA encouraged voluntarism among SHGs members in all villages where ASSEFA was operating. The volunteers are called “Saathis,” meaning “Friend.” Saathis helped in organizing health camps, meetings, and other services for the benefit of the SHG members. The activities of Saathis served as a catalyst in ushering in the intra-SHG voluntary cooperation through the MBT.

Democracy and/or Participatory Governance

Representatives of the SHGs elect the Board of Trustees (BoT) of the MBT. The BoT meets every quarter and reviews the performance of the federation. The Annual General Meeting (AGM) is held with the participation of representatives of SHGs. The AGM agenda includes the election of new BoT member in place of retiring Trustee(s), discussion and approval of the MBT activities in succeeding fiscal year, scrutiny and approval of MBT’s audited statement of accounts, and appointment of auditor. In both the BoT meetings and the AGM, approval of the majority of the members is considered as final decision.

Autonomy and Independence

The MBT is an independent and autonomous membership-based organization not under the control of any public authority. ASSEFA, being the promoter of MBTs, acts as a mentor, philosopher and guide. ASSEFA ensures that the MBTs render their services to the members as envisaged.

SSE FEMINIST QUALITIES OF MBT

As borne by the study findings above, the core features of an SSE entity are borne and practised by the MBT. More than this, the values and practices of MBT reflect the feminist qualities of SSE, in contrast to the masculine qualities of the mainstream neoliberal economy which promotes competition and the dominance of the strongest over the poor and the weak.

Let us look at how the feminist qualities are in-built in the practices and services of MBT.

At the outset, the MBT is governed and managed by women. The leaders, managers and workers of the MBT were once the members of the SHGs in the same area. They were identified, voted upon by the SHG members and gradually honed over the years to take up greater and higher responsibilities. Being a resident of the local area, the MBT officers know the people by name; they are empathetic, caring, and concerned about the members' welfare. They support the MBT members within the bounds of the rules and regulations of the MBT.

In addition, MBT identifies SHG members with leadership and/or management potential, who can be nurtured through suitable handholding training, and place them in suitable positions in the organization.

MBT also works to strengthen *solidarity* and *harmony* in the villages. Community mass wedding is one such program. It seeks to bring out the goodness of the villagers and motivate them to work together for the common cause and live in peace.

The mutual support to the vulnerables in terms of wage and life loss compensations uphold the feminist quality of *mutuality*. MBT also contributes, whatever is possible, in-kind or cash to support others during calamities like the COVID-19 pandemic, revealing its feminist nature of *generosity*.

FINANCING SUPPORT OF MBT

The major funding support of MBT is through borrowings from its sister company, Sarvodaya Nano Finance Limited (SNFL), a non-bank financial company (NBFC), established in 2001 to support all MBTs.

SNFL is the first NBFC owned by the community. Its shareholders are the MBTs only. SNFL borrows money from the mainstream financial Institutions such as the nationalized bank SIDBI (Small Industries Development Bank of India) and the HDFC (Housing Development Finance Corporation), and on-lend to the MBT members.

SNFL is managed by professionals. The SNFL raises funds nearly 10 times its share capital to meet the increasing credit demand of the MBTs. The MBT-Kariyapatti has invested Rs.6.0 million as equity in SNFL, and it has obtained credit up to Rs 64 million in 2023.

In the development credit business, MBT earned a surplus of Rs 3.4 million. This surplus was re-invested to support the enterprises of more members as well as to fund non-financial services such as capacity building/training.

For providing wage and life loss compensations, the MBT collects donations from its members and the public at large, stating the purpose of the donations. Similarly, donations are also collected from the SHGs and the public for mass weddings. A special campaign for donations is organized between the birth anniversary of Acharya Vinoba Bhave and Mahatma Gandhi i.e., September and October.

ASSEFA and the MBTs have been working together for a long period of time. The developmental and charitable activities they are doing are very well known to the public, who in turn have placed strong faith in

the services of these organizations. Consequently, the MBTs are able to raise funds from the local communities. For instance, all MBTs mobilized nearly Rs. 3.5 million as donation for the mass wedding of 108 couples held in August 2023.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

ASSEFA, a pioneering rural development organization in India, has been working for the betterment of the rural people for more than five decades. For the inclusive development of women, it has federated women SHGs at block level and registered the SHG federation as Mutual Benefit Trust. The author has selected MBT – Kariyapatti for the case study, which is located in a backward district of Virudhunagar, Tamil Nadu state in India.

The assessment of the MBT-Kariyapatti indicates that the founder has designed its structure and programs based on the needs of the poor and the vulnerable. The approach of ASSEFA has been to build community-based organizations, enable them to assess their common challenges, design programs with participatory approach, and implement them diligently.

The same approach is adopted in developing the rural women. Realizing the importance of participation of women in social action, ASSEFA introduced the social platform, “self-help groups” in the 1980s. This enabled them to come out of the social barrier of the family and interact with other women.

The introduction of savings and thrift activities enabled poor women to learn the art of financial management, use the banking services, identify the needs of the members and support them with small credit on rotation basis.

Subsequently, capacity building of the women in various disciplines including accounts keeping, financial management, group dynamism, leadership, livelihood activities and health care services has improved their self-confidence and enabled them to interact with others in the villages.

Linkages with nationalized banks for credit purposes gave the women the opportunity to undertake suitable income generation activities and earn income regularly. Marketing arrangements for dairy related activities have strengthened the earning capacities of these women. This has also empowered women to have more voice and authority in their families and close social circles.

To overcome the challenges of the bureaucratic approach of formal financial institutions, ASSEFA federated the SHGs at the block/area level and registered them as Mutual Benefit Trust Act (MBT). The MBT has not only enabled its members to have access to affordable loans, it has also used its surplus to provide non-financial services to the members such as wage and life loss compensations, free mass wedding, supply of drinking water, coverage under government health insurance, health camps, distribution of food & cash during health emergencies, and food security to the vulnerable. Plainly, the MBT contributes to decent work and the SDGs.

Based on the interaction with concerned stakeholders and self-assessment, the following recommendations are offered for the further improvement of the services of the MBTs.

- *Ownership of Assets:* The title of immovable assets such as housing plots, houses, lands, etc., remain with men in many families. This makes women a “vulnerable group” still. MBTs can find ways to enable women to own immovable assets. ASSEFA has already piloted a project wherein nearly 129 women received their housing plot with the title in their names.
- *Job Creation:* Most of the members depend on their labor to work in agriculture. The recent erratic nature of rainfall has affected women in the rural areas. MBTs can provide support to these women to engage in livestock rearing and poultry. MBTs can also encourage social entrepreneurs to establish cottage industries to provide regular employment opportunities for members working in the non-farm sector.

- *Adding value and marketing support:* MBTs can explore collaboration opportunities for adding value and marketing support for agricultural produce. For instance, in Kariyapatti area, the main crops grown are millets, pulses and vegetables. MBTs can collaborate with ASSEFA Food Mart in adding value to these products and market it through the ASSEFA Food Mart. This intervention will benefit not only the Food Mart, but also the producers and it will generate employment for the members.
- *Creation of green initiatives:* In the era of climate change, MBTs can use its strong network of members in developing green initiatives such as tree plantation, natural farming practices, application of green / renewable energy and so on. The green initiatives will not only address the problem of climate change but also create green jobs.

The author would like to thank ASEC and the All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia on Sustainable Development Goals (APPGM-SDG) for the invitation to present this case study. It is hoped that this case study will inspire SSE promoters to innovate suitable initiatives for the benefit of vulnerable women around the world.

Jai Hind.

Building Inclusive Communities for Environmental Sustainability

Chapter 6

Turning Trash into Treasure: Suphanburi's SSE-Driven Pathway from Waste Management to Sustainable Development in Thailand

Akkanut Wantanasombut

ABSTRACT

This study explores the innovative approach of the Suphanburi Garbage Revolution Community Enterprise (SGRCE) in Suphanburi province, Thailand, that adopts the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) framework with sustainable waste management practices.

SGRCE, a community-driven initiative, has raised funds from its members to build a pyrolysis facility capable of converting plastic waste into fuel. The enterprise operates by purchasing classified plastic waste from its members and transforming it into fuel. Though not premium grade, the fuel produced is good enough for agricultural machinery and is made available to community enterprise members at a lower price than standard market rates.

This initiative not only aids in environmental sustainability by effectively managing and recycling plastic waste but also provides economic benefits within the community enterprise. Members benefit from selling their sorted plastic waste and purchasing fuel at more affordable prices. In addition to these economic benefits, the enterprise plays a crucial educational role by training its members in effective waste separation and fostering environmental awareness and responsibility at a local, community-based level. SGRCE adheres to many of SSE's values and principles to tackle economic and environmental issues and others related to SDGs. The paper examines how the SGRCE activities affirm that the SSE framework can be implemented to create benefits, tackle environmental issues, and guide us toward achieving the SDGs.

INTRODUCTION

The Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) has emerged as a global movement poised to redefine economic engagement by centering around social impact, equity, cooperation, and sustainability. Distinct from the traditional capitalist economy, the SSE framework hinges on the principles of democratic governance, prioritization of social objectives, and the promotion of solidarity. These principles challenge the conventional profit-driven business paradigm, advocating instead for an economy that serves the community and the environment.

On the international spectrum, SSE encompasses a variety of entities such as cooperatives, mutual associations, non-profit organizations, and social enterprises. These entities are united by their commitment to social justice, ecological sustainability, and community empowerment, which are also intrinsic to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

While a relatively new term for the Thais, the SSE concept resonates deeply with practices long established in Thailand. Historically, Thai society has operated various forms of mutual aid, community self-help groups, and cooperatives, all of which align with the values of SSE. These traditional forms have not always been labelled as SSE since the term was recently introduced; however, they embody its essence—collective action for mutual benefit, emphasizing community resilience and social welfare over individual gain.

In Thailand, the landscape of SSE is rich and diverse. Cooperatives, the cornerstone of SSE, have been a part of Thailand's fabric since the early 20th century, promoting financial inclusion and supporting small-scale farmers. Community enterprises, as defined under the 2005 Community Enterprise Promotion Act, are a testament to this, with numbers growing significantly. These enterprises engage in various economic activities, ranging from agriculture to services. As of 2023, there are over 100,000 registered community enterprises, indicating their substantial presence in the Thai economy.

Among these community enterprises is the Suphanburi Garbage Revolution Community Enterprise (SGRCE), a vibrant example of how SSE principles can drive progress towards the SDGs. By integrating traditional community values with innovative environmental solutions, SGRCE stands as a model for sustainable development, ecological practices and social empowerment.

In this article, through a semi-structured interview, I will examine the practices and activities of the SGRCE using three frameworks:

- The SSE definition according to the 110th Session at the International Labour Conference in 2022.
- The feminist qualities of business entity proposed by the Asian Solidarity Economy Council (ASEC): 1) empathetic; 2) altruistic; care & concern for others; 3) nurturing; 4) cooperation, unity/harmony; 5) reciprocity/mutuality; and 6) generosity and the SDGs
- The analysis will focus on how the SSE and feminist values are aligned and can be used as guidelines for SSE entities to achieve the SDGs.

SPARKING A COMMUNITY REVOLUTION

Like many impactful collective initiatives, the SGRCE began with a vision driven by a motivated and natural leader. Peerada Patitas, inspired by the values of cooperation and environmental stewardship, left her successful career in Bangkok to contribute positively to her hometown, Bangplama, in Suphanburi. Her inspiration came from the principles of King Rama IX, centered around mutual help and a simple, sustainable way of life.

She first got involved in a project that helped people understand why plastic waste is bad. The project gave market sellers coupons for collecting and sorting plastic, which they could swap for things like sugar or fish sauce. The project was short and funded by the government, but it made a big difference. When it ended, the sellers didn't want to stop. They said it was a great idea and someone should keep it going. Peerada decided she would be that someone.

Even though nobody knew her at first, Peerada didn't give up. She asked to speak for a few minutes at local events, right before they finished. Sometimes, she only had 5 minutes, but she used that time to tell people about the problem with plastic waste. After her talks, she invited people to join a chat group on LINE, a popular app in Thailand. That's how more people started to know about her and her ideas.

From these short talks and chat groups, Peerada became known in her community. The people who listened to her and joined the LINE group became interested in her cause. Later, they helped start the SGRCE with her. They became the first group of people who owned a part of SGRCE and helped make decisions.

Peerada's campaign against plastic waste in her community highlighted a significant environmental challenge: the need for sustainable waste management solutions beyond the traditional methods like burning for electricity generation. This led her to explore innovative technologies that could transform waste into valuable resources.

Her journey took a pivotal turn after meeting with Prof. Dr. Tharapong Vitidsant of Chulalongkorn University and visiting his demonstration plant laboratory in Saraburi province. There, Peerada was introduced to the pyrolysis process, a technology capable of converting plastic waste into fuel. Inspired by this sustainable approach, she envisioned implementing a small-scale pyrolysis plant at SGRCE. This plant would not only address the waste issue but also generate fuel for local use, aligning with the community's environmental and economic needs.

However, developing even a small pyrolysis plant required significant funding of around 1.6 million baht, which is a substantial amount for a village community. Demonstrating remarkable leadership and trust in her community, Peerada embarked on a mission to raise the necessary funds. She leveraged the relationships and credibility she had built through her environmental campaigns and the trust she had garnered among the villagers.

Remarkably, Peerada successfully raised the required funds through contributions from eighty SGRCE members and supporters who believed in her vision. This achievement was not just a financial milestone but also a testament to the strong sense of self-help and community participation – core values of the Social and Solidarity Economy. The members' involvement in funding the project exemplified their commitment to the enterprise and its goals, highlighting the power of collective action and mutual support.

The fundraising success and the installation of the pyrolysis plant marked a significant advancement for SGRCE. It showcased how a community enterprise, under visionary leadership, can mobilize local resources and adopt technological innovations to create sustainable environmental solutions.

A BUSINESS MODEL INNOVATION THAT REFLECTS SSE VALUES

The Pyrolysis process involves the thermal decomposition of materials at elevated temperatures in an inert atmosphere. In the case of SGRCE, this process is used to convert plastic waste into fuel. This not only offers an environmentally friendly solution to waste disposal but also produces a valuable byproduct that benefits the community. However, according to SGRCE, they believe their true innovation lies in their unique business model.

At the heart of this business model innovation is a system that encourages members to participate actively in waste management. The journey to membership begins with education. Interested individuals must attend a workshop focused on waste management, with a particular emphasis on plastic waste. These workshops serve as a platform for education and awareness, equipping members with the knowledge they need to participate effectively in SGRCE's waste management process. SGRCE's members are involved right from the initial step - classifying plastic waste in their homes. This waste is then sold to SGRCE and is used to convert to fuel through the pyrolysis process.

The genius of this model lies in its reciprocity. In exchange for their efforts in waste classification, members can purchase the fuel produced by the pyrolysis plant at a much lower rate than the market price. The pricing structure of SGRCE is designed to benefit its members and sustain the enterprise's operations. Members who classify and sell plastic waste to SGRCE receive two baht per kilogram, a rate that incentivizes consistent and proper waste classification. In return, members can purchase the fuel produced from this plastic waste at a significantly reduced rate of 22 baht per liter, compared to the market rate of 35 - 40 baht per liter. This pricing strategy not only makes fuel more affordable for members but also reinforces the community's sustainability cycle.

Membership in SGRCE requires a commitment to learning and understanding environmental stewardship. One of the most distinctive aspects of SGRCE's membership model is the payment of the membership fee. Breaking away from conventional monetary fees, SGRCE accepts classified plastic waste as the membership fee. This approach serves multiple purposes: it makes membership accessible to all community members regardless of their financial situation, encourages active participation in waste classification right from the start, and ensures a consistent supply of raw materials for the pyrolysis process.

This approach has led to a ripple effect of environmental awareness throughout the community. Initially drawn by the benefit of affordable fuel, members gradually develop a deeper understanding of their environmental impact. This change in mindset is pivotal, as it represents a shift towards a more sustainable approach to waste management and environmental consciousness.

While Peerada is a driving force behind the SGRCE, however, the enterprise's true strength lies in its democratic governance structure. SGRCE believes that all members should participate in the enterprise's decisions through a democratic voting process. In matters of significant importance to the enterprise, SGRCE calls upon its members to exercise their right to vote. This process is grounded in

the principle of 'one member, one vote', ensuring that each member's voice is heard and valued equally, irrespective of their share or investment in the enterprise.

SGRCE's operational model is a powerful representation of SSE values in practice. It prioritizes the well-being of the community and the environment over profit. The democratic approach emphasizes collective decision-making and member participation, ensuring it remains a community-centered and collectively driven enterprise.

In its latest development, SGRCE has established its own foundation, "Ras Pitak SingWadeLom" (People Protect Environment), to manage its charitable activities. This foundation clearly represents SGRCE's commitment to distinguish between its limited-profit and for-community initiatives and philanthropic endeavors. Through "Ras Pitak SingWadeLom," SGRCE continues to expand its impact, now not just as a model of sustainable practice but also as a beacon of community-driven philanthropy.

FEMINIST QUALITIES OF THE SGRCE

SSE values are fundamentally aligned with feminist values. For instance, both concepts and value create benefits from the economic activities that cannot be monetized. Not only production and distribution but also cooperation, unity, and care create benefits. In this section, we will use feminist qualities: empathy, altruism and concern for others, nurturing, cooperation, mutuality, and generosity to analyze the activity of SGRCE operations and practice.

Empathy

SGRCE is led with a strong sense of empathy, as evidenced by its leadership's approach to understanding and addressing its members' emotional and practical needs. This quality shines through in their initiative to create a system that solves the problem of waste and respects and responds to the community members' feelings about their environment and livelihood.

Altruism, Care, and Concern for Others

The leaders at SGRCE have demonstrated an altruistic approach by prioritizing the community's welfare over profits. Their decision to provide fuel cheaper than market prices directly reflects their selfless concern for the well-being of the members, ensuring that the benefits of the enterprise extend to the entire community.

Nurturing

SGRCE's commitment to nurturing members' development is evident in how it engages them in sustainable practices. By conducting workshops on waste management and providing opportunities for active participation, the enterprise helps cultivate a knowledgeable and environmentally-conscious community.

Cooperation, Unity/Harmony

The spirit of cooperation is deeply ingrained in SGRCE's operations. The enterprise actively fosters a collaborative environment where members are encouraged to work together for the collective good. This unity and harmony have been crucial in achieving their shared environmental and economic goals.

Reciprocity/Mutuality

Reciprocity is a fundamental aspect of SGRCE's model. The enterprise has established a mutual benefit system where members can contribute waste and, in return, receive fuel at a lower cost. This system ensures all members are involved and benefit from the enterprise's success.

Generosity

SGRCE's generosity is apparent not just in its business model but also in its broader community interactions. While the enterprise focuses on sustainability, it also extends its generosity to its members by reinvesting profits for community development. Establishing a foundation, Ras Pitak SingWadeLom, for philanthropic activities reflects a genuine commitment to the collective well-being and showcases a readiness to support and uplift the community without seeking direct financial gain.

In these ways, SGRCE is an example of SSE feminist qualities in action, leading to a successful, sustainable, and cohesive community enterprise built on empathy, altruism, nurturing, cooperation, reciprocity, and generosity.

ALIGNING VALUES AND GOALS: SGRCE'S PRACTICES IN THE FRAMEWORK OF SSE AND SDGS

Examining the practices and activities of the SGRCE evidences how they align with both the core values of the SSE and the goals outlined in the SDGs. Table 6.1 offers a structured insight into this alignment, showcasing how SGRCE's day-to-day operations and broader objectives are rooted in SSE values and contribute to sustainability. This alignment underlined the enterprise's commitment to creating a sustainable, equitable, and inclusive future.

Table 6.1 SGRCE's practices in the framework of SSE and the SDGs

SGRCE Practices and Activities	SSE Core Features	SSE Feminist Qualities	Alignment with the SDGs
Providing affordable fuel and managing waste	Engaged in economic activities	Empathy and altruism	SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), SDG 13 (Climate Action)
Reinvest for community benefit	Primacy of people over profit	Nurturing and development	SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy)
Offering educational workshops and decent work opportunities	Contribution to Decent Work & the SDGs	Cooperation and harmony	SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 4 (Quality Education)
Mutual aid in the distribution of resources	Mutual aid	Reciprocity and Mutual Benefits	SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 11

			(Sustainable Cities and Communities)
Collaborative waste management efforts	Voluntary cooperation	Cooperation and harmony	SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation)
Member voting and leadership roles for women	Democratic and/or participatory governance	Democratic processes and women leadership	SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions)
Operating independently of government programs	Autonomy and independence	Independence in action and vision	SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure), SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being)

The alignment of the SGRCE with SSE values, feminist qualities, and the SDGs is remarkable and organic. Interestingly, when I asked, members of SGRCE mentioned they were unfamiliar with the term SSE and, while aware of the SDGs, did not actively base their operations on fulfilling these global goals. Instead, their approach has been driven by a commitment to doing what they believe is right and fair for their community and the environment. This organic alignment underscores a profound truth: organizations like SGRCE, guided by genuine intentions and community-centric values, inherently embody the principles of sustainable development. Their practices, though not explicitly designed to align with global frameworks like the SDGs or SSE, demonstrate how intrinsic values of sustainability, equality, and empowerment can lead to meaningful contributions to these broader goals. SGRCE is a testament to the power of community-driven initiatives in achieving sustainable development, highlighting the universal relevance of these values and objectives.

PAVING THE WAY FOR SUSTAINABLE CHANGE

SGRCE has a remarkable path, beginning with significant challenges but growing to inspire a nationwide movement. Initially facing hurdles, their persistence and innovative approach laid a foundation that has made it easier for subsequent initiatives to follow in their footsteps.

Gaining recognition through media coverage and endorsements from government authorities, SGRCE evolved from a local project into a national model for sustainable waste management. Their story's widespread reach transformed SGRCE into a hub of learning, attracting visitors from various regions keen to replicate their successful model. Furthermore, SGRCE leader, Peerada Patitas, has been instrumental in sharing their insights, significantly impacting the environmental practices of communities across Thailand.

This influence is evident in the replication of SGRCE's model in Northern and Northeastern provinces of Thailand like Phrae and Yasothon, with initiatives such as the Yasothon Garbage Revolution Community Enterprise directly mirroring SGRCE's methods. SGRCE's early struggles and eventual success have paved a smoother path for these new community enterprises, demonstrating the transformative power of perseverance in community-led initiatives.

SGRCE's journey showcases the powerful role of grassroots efforts in driving sustainable development. Starting with significant challenges, they not only overcame them but also made it easier for others to follow, all while continuing to evolve and expand their impact on both the environment and the community.

CONCLUSION

SGRCE's story illustrates a profound narrative of how local initiatives can resonate with global frameworks of sustainability and social solidarity. SGRCE began as a humble effort to address local waste management issues. Throughout its growth, it has unwittingly mirrored the values of the SSE. Their primary goals aligned closely with several SDGs.

SGRCE's practices in democratic governance, and community engagement naturally embody SSE's value of inclusivity and collective well-being. This approach has not only reshaped their local environment but also inspired similar efforts across Thailand, highlighting the broader relevance of their model to the SDGs focused on gender equality (SDG 5), sustainable cities (SDG 11), climate action (SDG 13), and responsible consumption and production (SDG 12).

SGRCE's story is a compelling illustration of how grassroots initiatives can mirror and advance global sustainability objectives. It serves as a clear example for communities nationwide, showing that meaningful, sustainable change can start locally and ripple outwards, influencing broader environmental and social progress.

Moreover, the SGRCE proves that the SSE and feminist values are not only aligned but pave the way toward sustainable development. Promoting SSE and Feminist values as guidelines for SSE and other business entities should be considered among stakeholders.

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Chapter 7

Socio-Economic Empowerment of a Poor Community through Biochar: A Social Enterprise Initiative in Jeli, Kelantan, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Building inclusive communities is a critical element in achieving many of the outlined sustainable development goals (SDGs). In this project undertaken through UMK-MoF Social Enterprise Program 2.0, the focus is on poor community members living in the surrounding areas of Kuala Balah, Jeli, Kelantan. This on-going project aims to elevate their socio-economic standing by providing a starting point for work and business opportunities through a social enterprise framework. The current participants consist of 3 females and 2 males who are being trained in the areas of biomass material conversion including biochar, coco peat, and compost for product development.

The creation of value and supply chain involves the process of up-scaling activities of biomass waste collection and conversion, raw material sourcing and preparation, media formulation processing, blending and production, packaging, marketing, sales, and distribution of biomass-derived products. This will directly and indirectly lead to generation and increase of income for the participants and community members. A biochar community cooperative has just been established and membership is open to all community members. The cooperative will oversee the up-scaling of the product development process. This is in line with one of the key economic activities stated in the National Co-operative Policy, which is agriculture and agro-based industry, and the Economy Planning Unit's (EPU) hope in realizing biomass industry potential.

In order to attain market competitiveness, efforts on demand creation through community product branding, improved packaging, and production certification are being explored. The social enterprise model allows the people to help themselves, and for them to help other community members in return, and will ensure the continuing flow of benefits. The project's success is expected to have a significant impact on the local community, providing sustainable livelihood opportunities, reducing and managing poverty, enhancing environmental sustainability, and promoting inclusive development.

INTRODUCTION

Building inclusive communities is a critical element in achieving many of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This resonates well with the 1st and 3rd pillars of the Belanjawan 2023 (Budget 2023), i.e., Inclusive and Sustainable Economic Growth, and Combating Inequality Through Social Justice, respectively. Furthermore, it captures the spirit of the letter 'M' for *Mampan* (sustainable), and 'A' for *Aman Makmur (Kesejahteraan)* (peace, prosperity, and well-being), (Ministry of Finance, n.d.) of the MADANI Development concept.

As a prelude, we are into the third year of the 12th Malaysia Plan (12th MP) running from 2021-2025, that maps the course of the nation's development towards building a prosperous, inclusive, and sustainable Malaysia. The 12th MP contains three themes, four policy enablers, and fourteen game changers. The three themes emphasize strategies and initiatives towards (i) resetting the economy, (ii) strengthening security, wellbeing, and inclusivity, and (iii) advancing sustainability. Sustainable and inclusive development has always been a key principle in the nation's development planning for people to benefit from socioeconomic development, achieve inclusivity and social cohesion, and improve general wellbeing (Ministry of Economy, n.d.). The national development priorities are well aligned, and effective execution of the 12th MP will contribute to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As we are all aware, this is a global commitment towards a more sustainable, resilient and inclusive development, with 17 SDGs. As we see it, inclusivity and

sustainability must go hand in hand with socio-economic empowerment of the community.

Moving forward, in our project context we have picked the three relevant key areas highlighted in the 12th MP and by the Economic Planning Unit (EPU), which are biomass industry, green growth, and circular economy. Given the vast availability of biomass resources, the biomass industry has the potential to be developed further, attract investment, and create new job opportunities. This industry also adopts the circular economy concept by reusing waste and contributing to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Every effort from all members of the society will help towards attaining a greener future indeed (Fadzil et al., 2022).

In this ongoing project undertaken through UMK-MoF Social Enterprise Program 2.0, the focus is on poor community members living in the outskirts of Kuala Balah, Jeli, Kelantan. This project aims to elevate their socio-economic standing by providing a starting point for work and business opportunities through a social enterprise framework. The project objectives are: (i) to increase the production capacity of biochar-derived products in a sustainable manner to meet current and new market needs; (ii) to improve the image of biochar-enriched crop planting media products through branding and packaging towards certification requirements for more effective marketing; and (iii) to provide a starting point for work and business opportunities for local poor communities to generate new income. The project is geared to contribute to the achievement of the following SDGs: SDG 1 (No poverty), SDG 2 (Zero hunger), SDG 8 (Decent work and economic growth), SDG 12 (Responsible consumption and production), and SDG 13 (Climate action).

SOCIO-ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF THE POOR COMMUNITY

According to Statista (2022), in 2020, the state of Kelantan had the second highest poverty rate in Malaysia with 21.2% of the population living below the average Poverty Line Income (PLI), after Sabah (25.3%). The average PLI for Malaysia was RM2,208 (with RM1,169 for food and RM1,038 for non-food items) in 2019; and RM2,589 (with

RM1,198 for food and RM1,392 for non-food items) in 2022. The average PLI for the state of Kelantan was slightly lower at RM2,139 (with RM1,181 for food and RM959 for non-food items) in 2019 (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2023a; eKasih, 2021), and increased to RM2,297 (with RM1,196 for food and RM1,101 for non-food items) in 2022 (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2023b).

Based on the MyCensus 2020 data, the Jeli Parliament constituency (P.030) has a population of 78,952 people with an incidence of poverty reading of 18.9%; while Kuala Balah (N.38) has a population of 17,684 people with an incidence of poverty reading of 12.1% (Open DOSM, n.d.). The hardcore poor are referred to those living below the average PLI of RM1,198 (national) or RM1,196 (Kelantan) based on year 2022 data (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2023b); up from RM1,169 (national) or RM1,181 (Kelantan) in 2019 (eKasih, 2021).

With such high incidence of poverty, there arises the urgency to find measures to improve the livelihood of the people. This by no means is meant as mooted continuous or prolonged financial assistance through handouts and subsidies. The process must progressively be towards liberating them from the poverty cycle and embody the three components of empowerment i.e., (i) clarity is conveyed through the project objectives; (ii) support is provided through knowledge transfer and capacity building activity; and (iii) with resources; and autonomy is attained and practised through the opportunity presented for them to upgrade themselves and their community as a whole. The socio-economic empowerment must reflect the ability of the community to initiate ways of motivating themselves to elevate their knowledge, skills, for betterment of living quality, and generate new and additional income. The participants in this project are expected to become the example of what can be achieved by all.

BIOCHAR-THEMED INITIATIVES

Biochar can be produced from a broad range of biomass materials such as agricultural refuse, crop residues, agro-industry waste, food and yard waste, among others. As plants grow, it captures carbon dioxide (CO₂) from the atmosphere during photosynthesis and uses it

to synthesize more biomass. Towards the end of the plants or crops life cycle, instead of subjecting the waste biomass (i.e., plant or crop residues) to open burning that pollutes, endangers health, and increases greenhouse gases emission, the wastes are utilized for making biochar. This is achieved through controlled thermal decomposition of the organic material in a low-oxygen environment, namely through carbonization and pyrolysis. These processes convert the carbon in the biomass to a more stable and concentrated form called biochar.

A review by Schmidt et al., (2021) shows numerous benefits of biochar ranging from retaining soil moisture and nutrients, stimulating root growth and photosynthetic performance, increasing soil microbial biomass and nitrogen fixation, among others. These are beneficial for improving overall soil quality, plant productivity, and significant for storing carbon. More favorable uses of biochar in agriculture practices have been reported in the literature (Mohd Fauzie, et al., 2021; Selvarajh, et al., 2021). As biochar is mixed or amended to soil or used in planting media, carbon is returned to nature. The cycle of plants growing, and then collecting its waste biomass, converting it to biochar, and returning it to earth removes CO₂ from the atmosphere. Thus, producing and using biochar is a form of carbon removal approach.

Biochar is a vital element for food security. It is key for increasing crop yield and agricultural productivity, while at the same time contributing to global climate change and carbon sequestration agenda. The Biochar project serves as a catalyst for the emerging biochar application industry in Kelantan. These beneficial properties provided the motivation for developing and producing biochar-based value-added products for the market. The focus is towards producing biochar, biochar mixed planting media, and other derivative biochar-based products.

EMBARKING ON A BIOCHAR-THEMED SOCIAL ENTERPRISE PROJECT

Being one of the higher education entities in the state and echoing the university for society narrative, the University Malaysia Kelantan (UMK) - Ministry of Finance (MoF) social enterprise project for the local community revolves around knowledge & skills transfer, and capacity building. This implies bringing academic knowledge to the public for the benefit of the people. However, the challenge is to identify tangible knowledge and practical skills set that can be conveyed, which should also be of interest and benefit to the community. Moreover, the project should have social sense and impact, it can be developed further over time, and be self-sustaining in the long run. Among the areas of research and innovation on product development technology, the one that stood out as a potential social enterprise project is the utilization of agrowaste materials and transforming them into biochar and value-added agro-products. The biochar project also aligns with the government's focus areas in biomass industry, green growth, and circular economy (Ministry of Economy, n.d.).

The next step was to identify commercially viable products that can be produced by the community while inculcating the culture of social entrepreneurship. The initial stepping stone was laid through the recently concluded UMK-MoF Social Enterprise (SE) 1.0 program, which is now succeeded by UMK-MoF SE 2.0 program. The on-going project targets poor community in the locality of Kuala Balah, Jeli, Kelantan with the following objectives: (i) to increase the production capacity of biochar-derived products in a sustainable manner to meet current and new market needs; (ii) to improve the image of biochar-enriched crop planting media products through branding and packaging towards certification requirements for more effective marketing; and (iii) to provide a starting point for work and business opportunities for local poor communities to generate new income. A brief profile of participants (P1-P5) enrolled in this program is provided in Table 7.1. They consist of 3 females and 2 males from the poor category residing in the outskirts of Kuala Balah, Jeli, Kelantan.

Table 7.1 Brief participants' profile

Info	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Sex	F	F	F	M	M
Age (years)	60	46	37	51	50
Highest education	Std. 6	Std. 6	SPM	SRP	SPM
Main occupation	Rubber tapper	Rubber tapper	House wife	Rubber tapper	Rubber tapper
Income	~RM150 /week	~RM130 /week	-	~RM100/ week	RM150/ week
Other occupation	-	-	-	Carpenter	Grass cutter
Income	-	-	-	~ RM450/mth	~RM80/ job

PROJECT JOURNEY TOWARDS INCLUSIVITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

It is utmost important to ensure active participation and engagement from the participants as they have no prior exposure to product development and social enterprise. One of the initial challenges faced were getting the idea of a cost effective and eco-friendly biomass conversion approach across to the participants. This ranges from initiating product development know-how, addressing issues of knowledge gap in awareness, aspects of ideation, workflow and financial management, demand creation, and market viability (sales and marketing), among others. To address these concerns, a series of workshops and knowledge and skills sharing sessions were arranged to familiarize them to production workflow, including machinery operation. The participants were trained in the areas of biomass material conversion including biochar, coco peat, and compost for product development. In the current phase, the participants will be sourcing and preparing coco peat, coco fiber, rice husk char on their own. This requires the availability of coconut husk crusher and separator machine, and rice husk carbonization drum. This will reduce overall production cost per unit and also provide new product variety for sale.

The potential of obtaining income from the project proved to be the main pull factor for the participants. The advantages of running the project this time around was the readily-available community workshop, product development roadmap, and the presence of pioneer batch members (from UMK-MoF SE 1.0). For the time being, the participants get paid for all work performed at the workshop which includes soil preparation, product mixing, packaging, etc. The wages depend on the number of product orders received. The creation of value and supply chain encompasses the up-scaling activities of biomass waste collection and conversion, raw material sourcing and preparation, media formulation processing, blending and production, packaging, marketing, sales, and distribution of various biomass-derived products (Figure 7.1).

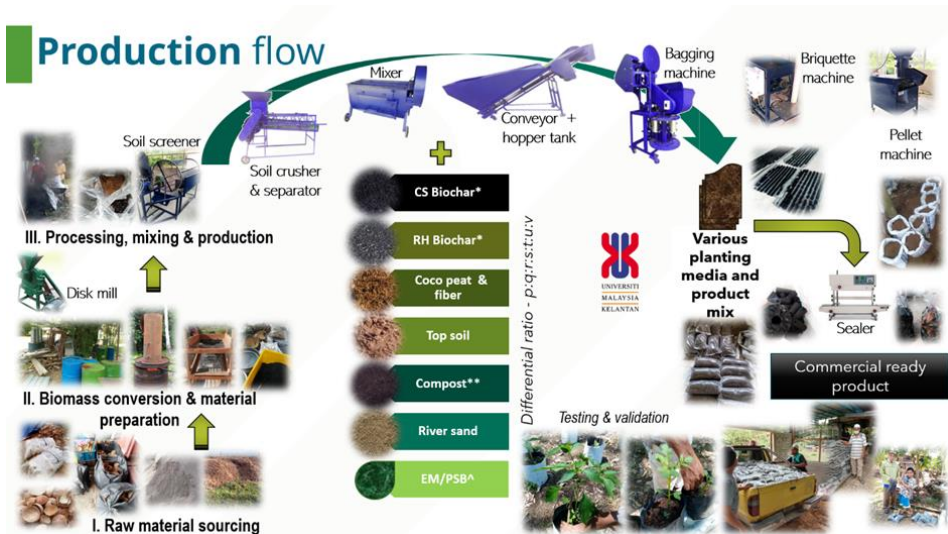


Figure 7.1 Production flow towards product development constituting knowledge & skills transfer and resource support for initial capacity building

In order to have a structured organization and exemplify to the community the purpose of the social enterprise initiative, a community cooperative was registered recently under the name of 'Koperasi Komuniti Bioarang Jeli Berhad' (Jeli Biochar Community Cooperative Ltd). The current participants are the founding members. It is hoped that the business will expand and bring in more community members to take part in the economic activities. This will directly and

indirectly lead to generation and increase of income for the participants and community members. Moreover, the setting-up of the cooperative is seen to streamline entrepreneurial activity. The cooperative will oversee the up-scaling of the product development process. The operational cost and capital expenditure are now borne by the cooperative. The project accords well with one of the key economic activity areas stated in the National Co-operative Policy, which is agriculture and agro-based industry (Malaysia Co-operative Societies Commission, n.d.).

The community members have already undergone a good work guide and certification knowledge sharing session recently. On 1st July 2023, the community co-operative was granted ISO9001:2015 certification under the scope for 'provision of production and packaging of the biocharcoal planting media'. This imparts the progress of the community project undertaken and as a recognition of the quality of product development. All of the biochar- based community products will be carrying the 'BiO@RG[®]' branding and logo. This marks a major milestone in terms of community commitment and achievement.

CHALLENGES AND THE NEED FOR COLLABORATIVE SUPPORT

From our viewpoint, inclusivity and sustainability must go hand in hand with socio-economic empowerment of the community while working towards SDGs. In the context of this project, it is crucial to ensure that production capacity and community workshop operations are sustained and improved. This can be done through day-to-day operation management planning and continuous monitoring. We believe the community members now will themselves take the responsibility of the social enterprise, albeit slowly but surely. Importantly, to make sure that the social enterprise is sustained and expanded so more community members can be included in it and experience the benefit.

However, the one major hurdle we have identified is the barrier of entry into the commercial market that is dominated by major, well-established or mainstream industry players. Now that the production capacity is increased, the market demand is vital in order to bring

about sales and generate income. This will require more intense and planned promotion, sales and marketing. This may become a bit challenging to the operators of the enterprise at this early stage. This was also a reason behind the establishment of the community cooperative, as a vehicle to address this issue. Immediate intervention through collaboration and support from various stakeholders such as departments and government agencies, CSOs, including APPGM-SDG, NGOs, and the private sector is most welcome to reduce the barrier of market entry. Any formal or informal partnership will help address the need. This can further encourage the use of community-produced products for the domestic market. According to Bank Muamalat Malaysia Bhd's chief economist, Mohd Afzanizam Abdul Rashid, the onus is on Malaysia's domestic demand to keep the economy growing within the 4% to 5% range in 2023 (Ganeshwaran, 2023).

MOVING FORWARD AND OPPORTUNITIES

Establishment of an organized community structure is critical to ensure that the early capacity building, and knowledge transfer program initiative can and will be sustained. As ownership of the enterprise is now with the community members, the responsibility is for them to safeguard its continuity and progress. More offshoot projects are being planned for the coming year. This is also foreseen to attract more community members to participate in the cooperative activities and operations. This approach not only builds inclusive communities but empowers them to contribute to the SDGs in the process.

While walking through community inclusiveness, social innovation would develop in parallel with time. According to OECD (n.d.), social innovation implies the design and implementation of new solutions that spreads from conceptual, process, product, or organizational change, that ultimately contributes to the improvement of the welfare and wellbeing of individuals and communities. It is worthy to note that many initiatives undertaken by civil societies have proven to be innovative in dealing with social and environmental problems, while contributing to economic development. Definitely, building inclusive communities in achieving SDGs in Malaysia is a cross-cutting co-

benefitting endeavor to be addressed holistically. As we have seen through this project, the social enterprise model allows people to help themselves, and for them to help other community members in return, which guarantees the continuation of the flow of benefits. The project's success is expected to have a significant impact on the local community, providing sustainable livelihood opportunities, reducing poverty, enhancing environmental sustainability, and promoting inclusive development in the constituency.

Biochar has been recognized as one of the climate beneficial carbon removal technologies, and to be followed by soil amendments (Nasdaq, n.d.). Co-production of biochar and provision of carbon credits offer potential carbon offset opportunities. On the local front, Bursa Carbon Exchange (BCX), Malaysia's voluntary carbon market exchange is set up towards achieving net zero GHG emissions by 2050. To be a net zero emissions nation, the need is to offset at least 76 million tCO₂e each year. The first ever carbon credit auction took place on 16th March 2023. A total of 150,000 carbon credits (valued at around RM7.7 million) were purchased by local bidders including Petronas, Malayan Banking, CIMB Bank, AmBank, Press Metal, Telekom Malaysia, among others. However, the carbon credits procured were from Linshu Biogas Recovery and Power Generation Project from China that aligned with SDG 7, 8, and 13, and another project from Cambodia that provides additional social co-benefits, contributing to the livelihoods of local communities and biodiversity conservation (Bursa Malaysia, n.d.).

To date, there is no local carbon credits supplier on BCX. This is where CSOs, agencies, and certification bodies can play a facilitating role especially with respect to community-based, nature-themed projects. The issues pertaining to carbon sequestration measurement difficulty through monitoring and verifying the permanence of carbon removal via biochar must be addressed accordingly. One way is to obtain carbon footprint certification by means of monitoring, verification, and reporting of processes, standards, and technologies practised. In the future, when the 1000 t/year biochar production capacity is attained, the community cooperative can explore for carbon credit

certification and it stands to gain economical return from the carbon market. The inclusion of biochar in planting media eventually used as soil amendments also provides an end use market for biochar. This can contribute to income generation for the community members and help sustain biochar production, product development, and facility operation.

CONCLUSION

All in all, the community project undertaking supports the building of more inclusive communities in line with the SDGs in Malaysia by means of socio-economic upliftment and ensuring that no one is left behind. In this on-going project, current work in progress is guided by the project objectives stated: (i) to increase the production capacity of biochar-derived products in a sustainable manner to meet current and new market needs; (ii) to improve the image of biochar-enriched crop planting media products through branding and packaging towards certification requirements for more effective marketing; and (iii) to provide a starting point for work and business opportunities for local poor communities to generate new income.

In terms of inclusivity and sustainability, the project not only offers a cost-effective, practical, replicable, sustainable and profitable solution, but at the same time addresses issues of open dumping and burning of agrowaste. This initiative will accommodate the empowerment of the lower bracket B40 income group (B1), as well as the poor, and hardcore poor who can enhance their income sustainably. Importantly this is an active, continuous long-term self-empowering solution for the local community in Kuala Balah, Jeli, Kelantan. This is seen to strengthen the social and solidarity economy (SSE) motive. Significantly, the project contributes to: SDG 1 (No poverty) by creating new and additional income opportunity for the community members (women included) and improve their economic well-being; SDG 2 (Zero hunger) through the indirect use of various planting media that improves crop and agriculture yield towards food security; SDG 8 (Decent work and economic growth) facilitated by new knowledge and skills transferred, and the setting up of a community cooperative; SDG 12 (Responsible consumption and production)

reflected through the use of raw agrowaste materials as feedstocks, and implementation of quality management system (ISO 9001:2015) in the production; and SDG 13 (Climate action) resulting from reduced open dumping and burning of agrowaste, lowering of CO₂e emission, through carbon sequestration and storage for climate change mitigation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project is being funded through UMK-MoF Social Enterprise Program 2.0 (InsPeK-ARG-00), with support from Institut Penyelidikan dan Pengurusan Kemiskinan (InsPeK), UMK. We also like to thank Mr. Nik Mohamad Zaid Nik Hassan from Koperasi Komuniti Bioarang Jeli Berhad (KKBJB), and all the well-wishers and contributors of the community project.

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**Building Inclusive Communities
for Rural and Forest-based
Communities through
SSE Initiatives**

Chapter 8

Community-Based Forest User Group: A Model of Social Solidarity Economy in Nepal

Bhola Bhattarai

ABSTRACT

The collaborative forest management (CFM) is a multi-stakeholder approach in forest management. This study explores the linkages between CFM practices and the principles of the social solidarity economy (SEE) using the Halkhoriya Collaborative Forest User Group (HCFUG) as a study unit.

The findings of the study show that the HCFUG applies the principles of social solidarity economy (SSE) such as collective ownership of common resources, participatory governance, and equitable sharing of economic benefits. The ward-level committee, forest management committee, and executive committee are the mechanisms for civic engagement, discussing social issues, and solving local problems. The HCFUG enables forest users to generate reliable income from timber, non-timber forest products, and forest management services. It uses 25% of the income for forest conservation, management, and development, 50% for development of the forest users community, and the rest for other purposes. It employs 13 community staff for forest patrolling and protecting the forest against encroachment. On a seasonal basis, it hires around 100 forest workers to clean the forest of unwanted waste, remove invasive species, and engage in community development.

BACKGROUND

Nepal is known as a country of community-based forestry. One-third of the national forest of Nepal is under the local community-based forest management system. A total of 30,000 plus community-based forest user groups are managing forests. There are different types and modalities within community-based forestry systems including

community forestry, collaborative forest management, leasehold forest, etc. In this case study, the collaborative forest management system is chosen so that the innovation of this system will be documented and shared with a wider audience promoting the social solidarity economy (SSE) at various levels.

COLLABORATIVE FOREST MANAGEMENT (CFM)

The CFM is a multi-stakeholder approach in forest management. However, this approach is explained in various ways in different countries. In India, it is known as Joint Forest Management (JFM) whereas in Bangladesh, it is called social forestry (Mahanty, Guernier, & Yasmi, 2009). Despite the different nomenclatures, the crux of collaborative forest management is to involve local communities in state-owned forest resources both in terms of responsibilities and benefit sharing through sustainable forest management (Pudasaini, 2018). In this regard, the basic philosophy of CFM is to engage all relevant stakeholders collectively to solve the issues of exclusion, access to distant users, and transparency in forestry (MFSC, 2000). Further, it is also argued that the collaboration of the government with other stakeholders strengthens the management system and increases efficiency in sharing roles and responsibilities (Carter & Gornow, 2005). So, CFM is broadly designed to "work collaboratively with the key stakeholders; local community, local government, and central government in the management of forest" (Carter & Gronow 2005, pp. 1-2).

The management approach of CFM varies across geographical regions in Nepal. The CFM approach implemented in Tarai aims to develop sustainable forest management in the region. The Forest Act of 1993 (second amendment in 2016, and Forest Act 2019 and regulation 2022), under which CFM in Tarai is implemented, is designed to foster collaboration among three main partners - the citizens, the local government, and the Division Forest Office (DFO). This collaboration is expected to protect, conserve, manage, and ensure the benefits to the community. In other words, CFM in Tarai is a citizen-led management system in which the local government provides financial and

management support. The DFO provides plans, policies, laws, and standards with regular monitoring and evaluation in the activities.

The CFM approach was initiated to ensure access and control over forest resources by people living far from the forest in Tarai. In this sense, CFM in Tarai sets out to fulfil the citizens' need for forest products, helps to reduce poverty by creating employment, maintains and enhances biodiversity, and increases national and local income through effective management of the forests (DoF, 2011). In addition, the CFM approach in Tarai seeks to increase the access to productive resources of distant users who are living far from the forest (Mandal & Bhattarai, 2014).

Drawn up in 2021, the CFM guideline affirms the right to access and control of the forest by the local community who forms the CFM groups among the forest users, including traditional and distant users, living in the south region of Tarai. There are currently 32 formally registered CFM groups in Tarai which comprises 0.8 million households, managing 83,364 hectares of forest area (DoF, 2018). A total of 42, 62,516 residents in Tarai are getting benefits from CFM (DoF, 2018).

For the purpose of this study, I have selected the case of Halkhoriya Collaborative Forest User Group (HCFUG) to explore the linkages between CFM practices and the principles of the social solidarity economy (SSE). The constitution of HCFUG is registered under the Forest Act of 2019 and the Forest Regulation of 2022; its Forest Management Plan has been approved by the government for five years, and it is supervised by the Division Forest Office (DFO).

The HCFUG is located in the Bara district of Nepal, which lies in the central Terai district of Nepal. The HCFUG was established in 2005 to protect, manage, and utilize forest resources. This is a legally registered entity under the Forest Act 2019 Article 24. The HCFUG is an organization of the local community who are dependent on forest resources using firewood, fodder, grass, timber, and non-timber forest products. The group was formed by the local people, who

prepared a constitution and forest management plan and registered it in the Division Forest Office (DFO).

There are 178,000 users at Halkhoriya CFM (HCFM) who have been managing a total forest area of 2,038.46 hectares since 2005. The HCFM works closely with the DFO in the management of the forest resources. It engages the community, local government, and the provincial government in effective policy formulation and implementation. Its major responsibilities are the protection of forests, sustainable management, and utilization of forest resources. It has newly elected board members who are from different communities. It currently employs 13 staff including a forest guard, social mobilizer, and accountant.

CORE SSE FEATURES PRACTISED BY THE HCFUG

Engaged in Economic Activities

The main objective of the HCFUG is to fulfil the basic needs of their members, the forest users. The forest users gather from the forest area such items as firewood, timber, non-timber forest products, biomass, and herbs. which they sell to the market. Their main source of income are timber and non-timber forest products. At the same time, the HCFUG provides forest management services such as patrolling and protecting the forest against encroachment and illegal logging. In some cases, the HCFUG also receives grants from the government for forest/environmental conservation activities and community development work. The HCFUG is still not making profit from its forest management activities.

In 2022, a total of 14,900 cu ft of timber and 41 Chatta of firewood were collected and distributed to nearby and distant users. In the year 2023, the surplus forest products of the previous year were still being distributed. According to the legal provision, 75% of the forest products generated by the HFUG belong to the HCFUG. These are distributed to the member-forest users based on certain criteria.

Primacy of People Over Capital and Profit

The main objective of HCFUG is to meet the basic needs of forest-dependent people including indigenous people settled outside the forest area, and to conserve forest and biodiversity. Based on the Forest Act and Regulation, 70% of the timber and firewood from forest management activities goes to HCFUG for distribution to its members, while 30% will be shared by the DFO. There are also other minor forest products such as biomass and herbs from which the HCFUG derives income. Some 25% of the income generated by HCFUG are used for forest management/conservation and social development activities. Another 50% of the income is utilized for community development, and the rest for other purposes.

Contribution to Decent Work and the SDGs

Adhering to its main objectives of creating employment opportunities, protecting the environment, and supporting the lives and livelihoods of women and other marginalized communities, the HCFUG continues to protect 2,038 hectares of productive forest and biodiversity. On top of this, it maintains a plantation in degraded land, a fixed-fenced area of 20-hectare forest, while at the same time controlling encroachment and removing invasive species from the forest.

To undertake these activities, the HCFUG employs forest workers who come from the poor and socially excluded including women and youth. It mobilizes the seasonal workers to harvest trees in winter. It provides occupational health and safety training to the workers, as well as safety gears (helmets, gloves, shoes, etc). It also conducts training, coaching, and mentoring support to women, youth, and other marginalized people. It ensures the participation and representation of those marginalized groups in the forest management process, sharing of benefits, and other regular work.

The direct beneficiaries of HCFUG, including those who live in distant places, are dependent on firewood for cooking. Indicating how important forest resources are for the poor people, those living in the southern area of the forest gather firewood 500 cycles per day. They collect fallen leaves to make organic fertilizers. They also collect fodder

for their cattle, pick fruits for their families to consume, fetch water from the streams, and many more resources from the forest.

Essentially, therefore, the activities of HCFUG contribute to SDG 15, i.e., protecting the forests and life on land, to SDG 13, i.e., climate action, and to SDG 5 on gender equality. The HCFUG also conducts social dialogue - through the tole (village) committee, the Village committee and the General Assembly, to elicit fresh and innovative ideas in forest conservation and management.

Mutual Aid

Mutual aid among HCFUG members is evident in times of disasters/calamities as well as in the conduct of social, environmental, and economic activities that are meant to meet their own needs as well as those of the people living in the peripheries of the forest.

- Providing firewood and timber to members and non-members in times of disasters/calamities
- Mobilizing members to undertake environmental protection activities such as distributing saplings to encourage members to grow fruits, planting trees/promoting private forest to reduce pressure in community managed forest, biodiversity conservation, minimizing human-wildlife conflicts through various interventions, and patrolling the forest to prevent illegal logging.
- Coordination and collaboration with DFO, local municipalities, and other state and non-state actors for the protection and betterment of the forest and the communities.
- Mobilizing the participation and collective action of members in the formation of user groups, electing committee members, organizing meetings ward level, forest management level, executive committee level) to solve community level problems, conflict resolution sessions, and so forth
- Mobilizing members for harvesting of old trees, collecting bushes and invasive plants.

Voluntary Cooperation

The HCFUG is a member-based organization of forest dependent communities in six municipalities of Bara district. People from these six municipalities are free to join and leave the organization without any penalty. This forest user group is also a member of Association of Collaborative Forest Users Nepal (ACOFUN) which is a national association for policy advocacy and support to CFUG. It also has a partnership with National Forum for Advocacy Nepal (NAFAN) for policy advocacy at provincial and federal levels.

Democratic and/or Participatory Governance

The HCFUG is a member-based organization. A total of 264,000 households of six municipalities are direct members of the group. It extends membership to persons living far from the forest, especially people settled at the borders of Nepal and India in the south. Additionally, the inclusion of 2 women in each ward is a commendable step towards gender equality and women empowerment. Furthermore, the forest's governing body comprises 13 elected members, out of which 3 are women, highlighting the importance of gender balance and diversity. But it doesn't stop there. The forest also mandates the inclusion of Madhesi, tribal tribes, and Dalit members, recognizing the unique perspectives and contributions of these communities. This collaborative effort truly embodies the spirit of inclusivity and sets an example for others to follow.

The HCFUG conducts meetings every month in a participatory manner. Members have equal voting rights and say in decision making. They attend ward level meetings to apply for the use of forest products, and participate in forest management activities and public hearings. The representatives gather in the General Assembly to select or elect their officials. The elected officials are accountable to the HCFUG members and other relevant stakeholders.

The HCFUG has commendable collaboration with the DFO, local clubs, women's groups, businesses, and the local municipal government. It has engaged the provincial and federal government units in policy

dialogues on crucial issues affecting the forest resources and the forest users.

Autonomy and Independence

While HCFUG collaborates with the government and enjoys the technical support of the DFO, it maintains its autonomy and independence from the government at the local, provincial and federal levels.

FEMINIST QUALITIES OF THE HCFUG

There are qualities of the HCFUG that are “feminine” in nature such as caring, nurturing and empathetic. The tole (village) level meeting, the CFUG Committee meeting, and the general assembly are the platforms through which the leaders hear the views of the members, men and women alike. They try to understand the situation of members who live far from the forest area and who could scarcely access the forest resources. The CFUG leadership plays a crucial role in providing training, exposure, and employment opportunities for the well-being of women, people with disabilities, and other marginalized people.

The HCFUG members also have caring and nurturing sentiment for the forest and its environment. HCFUG members play an active role in forest patrolling, planting new trees, thinning and pruning, and protecting the forest from illegal logging. In times of disaster and calamities, the HCFUG provides timber and other material support to the disaster-affected communities.

CORE FEATURES OF SSE ENTITIES PRACTISED BY THE HCFUG - SUMMARY

A summary of the SSE core features practised by the HCFUG is shown in Table 8.1.

Table 8.1 SSE core features practised by the HCFUG

Core Features of SSE entities	SSE core features practised by the HCFUG
Engaged in economic activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● HCFUG members/forest users gather firewood, timber, non-timber forest products, biomass, and herbs. which they sell to the market. ● HCFUG provides technical and management support to its members in their income generating activities.
Primacy of people and social purpose over capital in the distribution and use of surpluses/profits as well as assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● HCFUG is to meet the basic needs of forest users including indigenous people settled outside the forest area, and to conserve forest and biodiversity. ● 25% of the income generated by HCFUG are used for forest management/conservation and social development activities. Another 50% of the income is utilized for community development, and the rest for other purposes.
Contribution to Decent Work and the SDGs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● HCFUG creates employment opportunities, protects 2,0398 hectares of forest and biodiversity, and supports the lives and livelihoods of women and other marginalized communities. ● It conducts training, coaching, and mentoring support to women, youth, and other marginalized people.

Mutual aid	<p>HCFUG mutual aid activities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Providing firewood/timber to members and non-members in times of disasters/calamities. ● Mobilizing members to undertake: environmental protection activities (e.g., distributing saplings to encourage member to grow fruits, planting trees/promoting private forest to reduce pressure in community managed forest, biodiversity conservation); participate in forest management and solving community problems (e.g., patrolling the forest to prevent illegal logging, harvesting of old trees, collecting bushes and invasive plants and minimizing human-wildlife conflicts through various interventions).
Voluntary cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Membership in HCFUG is open to forest dependent communities in six municipalities of Bara district as well as indigenous people living outside the forest area. People from these municipalities are free to join and leave the organization without any penalty. Youth clubs of the HCFUG are active in the plantations.
Democratic and/or participatory governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● HCFUG members have equal voting rights. Every decision is made in a consultative process. HCFUG officers are elected by the members. The elected officials are accountable to the HCFUG members and other relevant stakeholders.
Autonomy and independence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● While HCFUG collaborates with the government and enjoys the technical support of the DFO, it maintains its autonomy and independence from the government at the local, provincial and federal levels.

In sum, the HCFUG is found to be practising the seven normative core features of SSE entities in a participatory bottom-up process that involves the unique roles of diverse stakeholders. The practices of HCFUG have “feminist qualities” such as *caring, nurturing* and *empathetic*. Women, indigenous people and other socially excluded members of the community are free to join the HCFUG and benefit from its economic and environmental conservation activities. It actively engages various government units in a mutually reinforcing partnership towards the achievement of decent work and the SDGs.

CONCLUSION

Participation of all stakeholders and beneficiaries in the formulation and implementation of regulations is crucial for equity and good governance. The participation of women, Dalits, and indigenous people in forest management activities empowers communities and also makes them accountable. This study provides evidence to the increasing trend of active participation of women, Dalits, and indigenous people in gaining access to different resources/opportunities in support of their lives and livelihoods. The study also affirms the monumental contribution of the CFM to decent work and the SDGs through its innovation of a specific form and appropriate mechanism for sharing rights, responsibilities, and benefits with consideration of social, gender, and ethnic equity.

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Chapter 9

SSE Case Study of Koperasi Ekonomi Rakyat Selangor Berhad and Association of Orang Asli Farmers, Malaysia

Kon Onn Sein

BACKGROUND

Koperasi Ekonomi Rakyat Selangor Berhad (KERSB) is a social enterprise registered with the Cooperative Commission of Malaysia. KERSB provides agriculture training and facilitates fair markets for the Orang Asli (OA). Since 2015, the program has now expanded from 14 to 45 OA farmers and has helped increase incomes by 2 - 3 times. Yayasan Kajian dan Pembangunan Masyarakat (YKPM) is a charity that supports the OA in infrastructure and capacity development. YKPM's mission is to "empower left-behind communities by working alongside them."

The SSE entity under study is a partnership of two stakeholders working together in converting indigenous people's lands into regenerative farms. One is the Association of Orang Asli Farmers, and the other is YKPM, a charity working in tandem with KERSB, a social enterprise that deals directly with the OA farmers to develop collective farming and facilitate access to fair markets with the private sector.

This study focuses more on the entrepreneurial partnership between KERSB and the Association of Orang Asli Farmers in running and managing a cooperation project of organic regenerative vegetable farming. Under this cooperation project, OA farmers produce organic, naturally grown vegetables in their individual plots or in a parcel of the OA communal land, while KERSB facilitates access to market for the OA produce. On top of facilitating market access, KERSB also creates a shared prosperity enterprise where the OA share in the profits and is regarded as an equal partner in wealth creation of the value chain. In this model, the OA captures 40% of the retail price compared with conventional markets which only give them 20%.

As a result of surplus incomes, the OA farmers are able to buy washing machines and not worry about having enough food for their children. Some have sufficient surplus to extend their homes and buy cars. Most notably, the confident farmers are expanding the farms with their own savings.

Alongside coaching in farming skills, KERSB provides coaching in farm management. In the past, the OA community was fragmented and community cooperation weak. Now, with 30% of the community involved in farming, it has created a united base for the community to cooperate and they in turn introduced systems of accountability. This has resulted in more villagers regaining confidence in the leadership and participating in community activities including conservation of their watershed areas and restoration of their forest.

The monthly operating farming expenses are covered by the farmers themselves except for the initial infrastructure capital cost and the big-ticket lorry, tractors and irrigation system. With regard to the marketing expense, the farmers are contributing about 40% of the cost whilst the balance of 60% is carried by grants. The marketing cost may take another 3 years before the farms generate sufficient revenues to become fully sustainable.

This SSE entity goes beyond improving the economy of the OA community but also leads to high social impact in line with the SDGs of no poverty, creating decent work, combating climate change and inclusivity.

An analysis of the two anchor stakeholders that comprise the SSE entity -KERSB the marketing cooperative and the Association of OA farmers- is detailed below using the 7 core features of the SSE entity.

ANALYSIS OF THE 7 CORE FEATURES OF A SSE ENTITY: KERSB

Engaged in Economic Activities

KERSB looks for fair markets and organises the farmers to sell to the markets.

Primacy of People and Social Purpose over Capital in the Distribution and Use of Surpluses/Profits as well as Assets

All surplus is ploughed back to build capacity of the farmers through acquisition of machinery, cold room, building of collection centre, logistic support, upscaling, farm inventory and marketing services.

Contribution to Decent Work and the SDGs

KERSB members do not receive dividends. Office bearers also hold office on a voluntary basis. However, KERSB engages a manager who is paid to operate the trading business. As long as the partnership between KERSB and the Association of OA farmers is sustained, the OA farmers enjoy stable employment in farming.

Mutual Aid

Mutual aid is practised as KERSB raises funds to provide flood relief and emergency assistance for medical and bereavement expenses to the OA. In the case of KERSB as a cooperative, members contribute their own equity shares. KERSB members also provide their expertise to conduct capacity building skills for the natives.

Voluntary Cooperation

The partnership is managed on the basis of voluntary cooperation between KERSB and the Association of OA farmers. As a membership-based organisations, KERSB also operates on the basis of voluntary participation among the members in carrying out the activities of the cooperative.

Democratic and/or participatory governance

Members are free to join and leave the cooperative.

Autonomy and Independence

The cooperative is regulated by the commission of cooperatives but is otherwise independent.

ANALYSIS OF THE 7 CORE FEATURES OF A SSE ENTITY: ASSOCIATION OF OA FARMERS

Engaged in Economic Activities

The Association is engaged in planting, harvesting and selling farm produce to the market.

Primacy of People and Social Purpose over Capital in the Distribution and Use of Surpluses/Profits as well as Assets

The OA farmers receive the full amount of sales revenues, less 5% for paying debts, in case they have taken a loan. In addition, they set aside 3% of sales revenues as remuneration to an OA farmer who does the quality control of farm produce and manages the farm inventory. They also put 1% of their sales revenues to a common fund for repairs and maintenance of their farm machinery.

Contribution to Decent Work and the SDGs

The OA farmers receive 40% of the retail price in comparison with the traditional 20%. They own the land that they till and they decide on their own working hours. They get paid according to their harvest outputs.

Mutual Aid

Mutual aid is practised by the OA farmers by raising funds to pay for the cost of repairs for their farming machinery, pumps and equipment. However, it is more as individual farmers rather than the association of farmers as a collective that they provide emergency assistance for medical and bereavement expenses. They also contribute their ideas and manpower in supporting an education programme for their children. They participate in developing a protocol for the community to document the importance of the forest and their way of protecting the forest. They share knowledge and encourage others to participate in their farming activities.

Voluntary Cooperation

The OA farmers are free to decide when to start planting their farms and benefit from the endeavour. Being their own bosses, they decide their own working hours and the production volume. They are free to leave the Association if they disagree with the conditions.

Democratic and/or Participatory Governance

Farmers are the owner-managers of their own land. Their association is an informal one, it has not yet been registered with any government agency. Each farmer-member decides on his/her working hours and the volume of production. Membership is based on commitment to organic farming and contribution to the common fund. The farmer-members form a working committee by election, which functions as a decision-making body. They contribute voluntarily in meeting common costs such as fuel and repairs of farm machineries, and remuneration for the person in charge of quality control of farm produce and maintenance of farm machineries. They also share facilities and optimise income through collective farming. At any time, a member is free to withdraw membership in the Association.

Autonomy and Independence

The farmer-members cultivate their own plot or do farming on communal land that belongs to the community. They can grow other crops for which they can find a market. KERSB extends its advisory function to the OA farmers on issues such as market pricing and types of crops that are marketable. Non-use of chemicals and standards of hygiene of production are requirements of organic farming that KERSB inculcates among the OA farmers so that they can avail of premium price for their farm produce.

ASSOCIATION OF OA FARMERS – CORE FEATURES VAGUELY PRESENT OR NOT STRONGLY PRACTISED

This section examines the core features of SSE entities that are vaguely present or not practised by the Association of OA Farmers.

Democratic and Participatory Governance & Voluntary Cooperation

Most OA farmers cultivate their own farms and decide how to use their incomes individually. Sustained cooperation does not come automatically despite their culture of living in harmony. Hence, the need for intervention in organising the farmers, co-designing systems and building cohesion. External support, both technical and financial, was necessary in the early stages and geared towards building confidence and participation of more farmers in attaining economies of scale. Most of the farmers did not want or were not able to contribute towards acquiring common infrastructure and costly equipment such as water pumps. At this juncture, YKPM intervened by providing funds to purchase the needed machinery and infrastructure. Without such initial support, farmers who could contribute would find it unfair that others are not sharing the cost equally, and this would lead to disunity and failure of the collective initiative.

Fortunately, the OA farmers were willing and able to contribute towards meeting the cost of seeds and the fuel cost of running the water pumps. Systems had to be co-designed with assigned tasks like collective bulk discounted purchase of seeds, chicken dung and packing materials. Systems to check inventories, quality standards and organise distribution were also set in place to sustain cooperation. Without a system, the usually helpful OA doing the various tasks would feel taken advantage of by the rest and the cooperation would break down. Using technology and systems had to be used to sustain this cooperation. An example of this is the payment to the respective farmers for their harvest is done through a direct transfer from KERSB to the respective farmer's individual account with the automatic deduction from harvest pay to a maintenance fund, obviating the unpleasant monthly task of chasing farmers for their contributions and to remind defaulters.

YKPM also had to facilitate the transition of the OA farmers from a culture of subsistence to an abundant/surplus lifestyle. In the 1990s, the OA community subsisted on hunting and gathering. The transition to a surplus economy required a long period of time. The OA farmers

were also not used to working together on a sustained basis. This too required social and management interventions in order to build and sustain cooperation. Interestingly, the OA farmers have a culture of *gotong royong* (working together/collective action) but it is practiced in the context of short incidents such as cooking for a wedding ceremony, funeral event or clearing land.

Where economic activities required long term collaboration, intentional facilitation is indispensable for the purpose of building capacity and skills in managing a collective enterprise, setting up of a common fund, and running the operations of a membership-based organisation. Even so, only 10 to 20% of the members were willing to voluntarily commit to serve in the Association's Management Committee. One good thing is that all farmers were agreeable to contribute to a common fund for repairs of machinery. In the process, they also agreed to contribute 3% of their sales revenues towards paying one of their members who would organise the distribution of their farm produce

The establishment and functioning of KERSB contributed to the reduction of the risk of non-cooperation in as much as professional management brought with it transparent and responsible accounting of funds and farm inventory, which enabled the OA enterprises (i.e., regenerative farming) to generate profits from which the shared costs were deducted. In this manner, none of the farmers could default. KERSB, in turn, used the profit to pay for the cost of transporting the vegetables to the retail outlets in the city. As the farm approached its 5th year, all subsidies from YKPM had stopped and KERSB's presence to coordinate the OA's collective farming was reduced. In the transition, the OA farmers were reluctant to take over the management on a voluntary basis. Some of their coordinators were willing to work for as long as they were paid for their services.

The reluctance to do voluntary work on a long-term basis for the purpose of encouraging, training or imparting skills to help fellow farmers is understandable in the context of the OA culture. No one wants to be perceived as being too smart to instruct others and be

listened to. Individualism and self-interest may have also played a role since the OA tends to avoid the risk of investing time and effort in building and supervising the OA enterprises at one's own expense. The long-time elders also appeared to be getting tired of leading that required extra work for coordination without corresponding compensation. These hitherto selfless leaders did not want to be taken advantage of by their own people in a commercial undertaking that could generate benefits for all, at the cost of their self-sacrifice. On the other hand, there was the impression that those who do not want to contribute voluntarily in managing the collective farm will have to pay for their indolence. All these considerations denote the importance of investing in building selfless leaders and their support group to ensure greater prospects for the cooperation project to lead towards community transformation.

Mutual Aid and Voluntary Cooperation

Another weak feature of the Association of OA farmers is that it has not established a fund for emergencies. Ironically, this weakness is not consistent with their indigenous worldview of sharing. This weakening of their indigenous values is perhaps due to the cash economy and modern education system that elevate individualistic effort and private gains over and above the welfare of the community. There is a need to restore these community values and use SSE to regain the values of shared prosperity among the Orang Asli.

ANALYSIS OF FEMINIST QUALITIES

The feminist qualities of SSE are manifested by the Association of OA Farmers in various forms. There are individual members who contribute directly to OA beneficiaries for meeting emergency needs but not as a collective. There are those who share their skills and teach new farmers and even support in setting up their own irrigation system. There are those who are willing to share their land for limited use with farmers whose land has been adversely affected by flooding. They collaborate by forming a farm management committee. They organise themselves to do bulk purchase and save on transport. There is generally a happy mood when the farmers all gather together every 2 days a week to do their packing in the central processing center.

Here, they catch up with one another, encourage and motivate each other. Evident in all these practices are the feminist qualities of empathy, altruism, care and concern, nurturing, unity, harmony, cooperation, mutuality and generosity.

All said, the challenges are apparent in qualities of altruism and generosity. There is some reluctance to contribute part of their profit towards a community fund that provides a social safety net for all members of the community. But perhaps, they have little surplus to willingly do this. With regard to mutuality and helping their own farm members, there is a system of reciprocation. They contribute towards the repair and maintenance funds and shared expenses. There is relatively good empathy, concern and nurturing of farm members. Outside of their farming members and neighbors, there is less connectedness. Nonetheless, they are generous in giving their surplus vegetables to community members in need. The feminine qualities are more limited in terms of financial support but in other areas, the nurturing, generosity qualities are displayed through their sharing of surplus crops and *gotong royong* (voluntary work together) in common community activities.

With respect to sharing their feelings, the culture of being non-confrontational is a challenge and intermediaries are often used to convey hidden feelings. Leaders are expected to know and be able to understand the nuances of the non-confrontational mindset. Everyone is assumed to be responsible and fair and so they do not need to be taught through open confrontation. Being an egalitarian society, the OA leader may refrain from pushing ahead with decision making so as not to offend or where there are complaining intermediaries or strong disagreements. Leaders themselves lack confidence or are unable to forge forward with good ideas due to non-consensus. A strong-willed leader is seen as 'bad' and 'pushy'. But at the same time, the OA needs a leader who can bring about consensus and purposeful collective action. At this juncture, the culture of collective leadership in the OA community is in transition. An external change agent could be of help in engendering unity and harmony towards building inclusive OA communities.

ASSOCIATION OF OA FARMERS' LEADERSHIP

The organisational structure of the Association of OA Farmers is hierarchically flat. Whilst this organisational design is great in terms of equality, it encounters difficulties in moving forward collectively. Getting consensus to move forward is sometimes not possible when there are strong disagreements by just one person or a very small minority. In view of the egalitarian nature of the OA culture, it would ease decision-making in the Association if it were to adopt a 2/3 majority rule.

Somewhat contradictory to the egalitarian culture is the practice of imposing the decision of the village committee chair despite non consensus. This could invoke a non-confrontational response of members by not following instructions. As a result, the organisation can only move forward slowly, if not stalled by dissension and antipathy.

Another challenging situation is that the journey to reaching economies of scale and sustainability is long. Farmers are not so profit driven and high income is not top priority. Consequently, the ensuing volume of production is too small that sales revenues are not sufficient to cover all the cost of marketing. There is a lack of appreciation and urgency that this partnership approach requires the farmers to increase production and make this partnership sustainable. Therefore, the process to achieve economies of scale takes a longer time.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The entrepreneurial partnership model of KERSB and the Association of OA Farmers has been slow to reach sustainability. It has been 7 years and whilst sales revenues have fully covered all farming costs, only 40% of the marketing costs are covered. The participation rate for OA joining the farming enterprise is about 30% after 3 years and thereafter, growing at a slower rate. Vegetable farming is labor-intensive and requires daily care. Hence, not everyone is willing to adopt this as their primary livelihood. Some have treated farming as a complimentary income due to age, health or commitments to look

after children. A few have made it their main income source. Overall, it has given them a reliable and stable source of income. This is more so for the women who make up 70% of the farmers.

The pace of acceptance is slow for various reasons. The technology of natural farming at commercial scale was difficult and involved a steep and long learning curve. This was a daunting process, farmers had to encounter pests, extreme weather, endurance to build skills and the uncertainty of harvest during the skills-building stages. As production was small, developing a stable market also took about 2 years to shape. Many were still adapting from a subsistence mindset to a surplus economy and high income was not the dominant singular driving motivation. Farmers produced as they needed for sufficiency and not for economies of scale. As the villages are isolated, small and remote, the goal to reach economies of scale quickly needed more patience.

Mutual help is healthy mainly among the farmers and less strong for the wider community. They seem to have trouble in encouraging more of the villagers to participate. However, they are generous in sharing their surplus vegetables with the villagers. And they participate in the village wide community activities.

To improve on this SSE model, the following are recommended:

- Widen livelihood options to enlarge enough options that can attract the interest for more to participate.
- Set up a central collection center which allows more villagers to access fair markets to reach economies of scale more quickly.
- Partner with distribution agents who have efficient logistics solutions and market distribution.
- Speed up economies of scale by replicating in other villages and partnering existing CSO who are already strongly trusted by the community. Also to increase livelihood options and provide more choices for the villagers to participate and grow markets.

- Set up a 2/3 majority vote for group decision making in event there is no consensus.
- Set up a fund where every farmer has to contribute 1% of profits into the community fund.

Chapter 10

Cultivating Equity and Equality through Agrarian Reform: Unveiling Social Solidarity Economy, a Case Study of Serikat Petani Pasundan (SPP), Indonesia

Eri Trinurini Adhi and Jenni Illona Mayshiogie

ABSTRACT

The assessment of the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) core features of the Serikat Petani Pasundan (SPP) or Pasundan Farmers Union has two main objectives. Firstly, in the short term, it aims to ascertain whether the SSE core features are manifested in the practices and activities of the SPP. The SSE core features include engagement in economic activities, the primacy of people over profit, contribution to decent work and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), mutual aid, voluntary cooperation, democratic governance, and autonomy and independence. Secondly, the assessment aims to identify strategies for strengthening SPP's institutional capacity to meet the challenges in achieving the goal of increasing farmers' welfare and promoting inclusive development through agrarian reform.

With a 20-year-long advocacy, the SPP has commendably made a significant impact on 51,000 farm households in the districts of Ciamis, Tasikmalaya, Garut, and Pangandaran in the West Java Province, Indonesia. This impact was achieved through the redistribution of 104,000 hectares of arable land which contributes to securing the livelihoods of farmers. As a grassroots organization, the SPP shares a strong commitment to the common goals in agrarian reform, with a focus on environmental and social issues. This assessment has confirmed that the seven core features of an SSE entity are evident in the practices and activities of the SPP, including its contributions to the SDGs, particularly SDG 1 (poverty), SDG 2 (zero hunger), SDG 4 (quality education), and SDG 5 (gender equality).

Currently, the organization faces a crucial challenge—the absence of a comprehensive post-land acquisition economic prosperity strategy within its core management framework, particularly concerning entrepreneurial endeavors. SPP's gender-inclusive approach has impacted economic activities in the village, strengthening social safety nets. Pasundan's phenomenal achievements serve as an inspiring example for regions worldwide, highlighting the potential for change when grassroots movements prioritize gender equality and social reform. Lastly, it is recommended that the SPP review its strategic plan to balance the struggle for land with economic purposes.

BACKGROUND

This Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) assessment aims to ascertain whether the seven core features of an SSE entity are manifested in the practices and activities of a grassroots organization, and to determine the organization's contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Pasundan Farmers Union, known as Serikat Petani Pasundan (SPP), serves as the case study for this pilot assessment.

The SPP is a membership-based organization that could be classified as both an association of farmers and a civil society organization. The organization has long maintained its commitment to agrarian reform and its unwavering support for the working classes, including farmers, peasants, and seasonal workers. According to SPP handbook "Gerakan Rakyat untuk Pembaruan Agraria," meticulously compiled by the SPP General Council, the SPP staunchly asserts that its mission is to champion the cause of agrarian-reform, seeking to uplift and empower Pasundan farmers who have historically been marginalized. Currently, the SPP consists of four farmers' organizations in four districts (Tasikmalaya, Garut, Pangandaran, and Ciamis).

The origins of SPP can be traced back to the year 1989 when a group of highly educated and passionate youths, who were active members of the Forum Pemuda Pelajar dan Mahasiswa Garut (FPPMG), a left-leaning youth forum based in Garut, West Java, joined forces to create what would become a transformative organization. It was a story that resonated deeply with the members and sympathizers of SPP, the tale

of young, dedicated individuals united by a common vision and a firm commitment to addressing the longstanding struggles of the historically underserved farming communities in the Pasundan region.

At its inception, the FPPMG's focus extended beyond agrarian reform alone. During this time, it became evident that local oligarchs, who were powerful landowners driven by capitalist interests, posed a significant threat to the rights and well-being of the local farming community. Recognizing the pressing need to protect their community from the oppression of these influential individuals, FPPMG took decisive action. They marshaled their resources and expertise in activism, determined to counteract the looming danger and safeguard the interests of the local Pasundan farmers' community. The year 1995 marked a pivotal moment when FPPMG established the Yapemas (Yayasan Pengembang Masyarakat) or Community Development Foundation. This strategic move not only reflected their commitment to combating the oppressive forces of Indonesian State-Owned Enterprises, including PT. Perhutani and PT. Perkebunan Nusantara, but also symbolized a significant turning point in their mission to empower and uplift the Pasundan farming community. It was a momentous step towards ensuring the rights and welfare of the farmers in the face of formidable challenges.

In the turbulent period of 1998-1999, Indonesia underwent a profound transformation as it entered the Indonesian Reformation Era. This momentous shift followed the fall of President Soeharto's New Order (Orde Baru) regime, which had held a firm grip on the nation for decades. Amidst this backdrop of change and hope for a brighter future, a remarkable alliance was formed by the FPPMG. Notably, the FPPMG collaborated with two influential left-leaning student organizations: the FPMR (Forum Pemuda dan Mahasiswa untuk Rakyat) based in Tasikmalaya and the FARMACI (Forum Aspirasi Rakyat dan Mahasiswa Ciamis) located in Ciamis. These two student organizations shared a common goal, one that sought to drive forward the ideals of land reform and social justice in the Pasundan region.

It was a pivotal moment in their historical context. The convergence of these groups from Garut, Tasikmalaya, and Ciamis was a powerful testament to the collective determination of young farmer activists to effect change. The union of these passionate social-justice activists and farmers laid the foundation for what would become the SPP movement we know now, officially declared on January 24, 2000. The historic declaration of SPP was not only a formal recognition of their agrarian mission but also a symbolic commitment to the principles of land reform and justice. As the SPP movement gained momentum, it continued to expand its outreach, and the journey to empowering the land was far from over. On October 20, 2000, the Organisasi Tani Lokal (OTL) in Pangandaran, West Java marked the inclusion of Pangandaran regency which became the fourth district to join this inspiring movement of SPP.

SSE CORE FEATURES

The practices and activities of SPP that illustrate the seven core features of an SSE entity are described briefly below.

Engaged in Economic Activities

The economic activities of SPP have been initiated at the grassroots level. The members of the SPP-affiliated grassroots organization have established saving-loan cooperatives in the 4 districts with 2,203 members. Serving as an umbrella organization that provides management and technical support to its affiliate organizations, the SPP sources its income from membership fees, profit share on the agriculture sales of the members, and service fees from professional work with other institutions/donors. The SPP has at least two service units: formal education (schools in the 3 districts) and legal aid. These two service units are financially independent from the SPP. Although the agricultural products of the members have market potential, the SPP has yet to fully embark fully into agribusiness which could help increase the incomes of its members.

Primacy of People over Profit

The SPP is oriented toward the social and environmental first. The mission of land redistribution is manifested through the goal of returning farmers to their land, ensuring livelihoods, and promoting overall welfare. The organizational ethos of SPP is grounded in autonomy and self-reliance. In support of its mission, the SPP allocates its funds in advancing its advocacy of social issues, supporting capacity building programs for members, and operating costs such as transportation, and consumption fees (no wages) for the staff.

Contribution to Decent Work and the SDGs

The land redistribution program has provided farmers with the opportunity to sustain their livelihoods. Additionally, the SPP has implemented a social safety net program and social dialogue with the local government. SPP has contributed to the SDGs in several ways as described in Table 10.1.

Table 10.1 SPP's contribution to the SDGs

SDGs	SPP's Contribution
SDG 1: No Poverty	By providing land to the farmers, SPP has played a significant role in reducing poverty. Each of the members now has access to the land.
SDG 2: Zero Hunger	With access to arable land, the farmers can cultivate rice and other agricultural products for their consumption and selling to the market. This increases the food security of the farmers and makes them more resilient.

SDGs	SPP's Contribution
SDG 4: Quality Education	<p>Informal education provided by SPP:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-school: 1 unit • Elementary school: 1 unit • Secondary school: 4 unit • Agriculture high school: 3 unit • Total graduated students: 985 persons <p>Capacity building sessions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SPP conducts several thematic capacity-building sessions for the members, such as on leadership and land reform.
SDG 5: Gender Equality	<p>Gender equality is manifested in SPP's decision-making process. All the women are involved in discussions. The redistribution land policy has been regulated so that women have the same rights to the land as men. A total of 1,527 land certificates have been issued under the name of the wife.</p>
SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth	<p>The land redistribution program covering 194,000 hectares of land has provided an opportunity for 51,000 farming households to sustain their livelihoods. Furthermore, the SPP has implemented a social safety net program and social dialogue with the local government.</p>

Mutual Aid

The grassroots organizations in the 4 districts have established saving and loan activities. These savings and loan activities are very useful for managing the farm, allowing members to borrow from the cooperative in case of need. Members also contribute funds at the village level to support organizational activities. In the village Cikalong in the Pangandaran District, the members have collected money to

build the farmers' hall for gatherings/meetings and to serve as an office for their cooperative.

Voluntary Cooperation

Most of the farmers join the SPP because they share the same mission for agrarian reform, aiming to increase family welfare. They can voluntarily join SPP and freely leave the organization without penalty. In the event of a member's death, the membership will be continued by their children who will manage the agricultural land.

Democratic and/or Participatory Governance

As a membership-based organization, the decision-making is in the hands of the members/farmers. This has been practiced consistently throughout the organization structure from the grassroots organization's assembly (village levels), to regional assembly, and district assembly. Women are always involved in the meetings. The decisions are taken deliberatively.

Autonomy and Independence

The SPP is an autonomous organization and not under local government control or interference.

ANALYSIS OF THE CASE STUDY

SSE Core Features: Resources Potential vis-à-vis Organizational Management

The SPP resources are a testament to its influence, boasting a membership of 51,000 households, comprising approximately 137,000 individuals. Operating across four districts, it engages with local farmer communities on a substantial scale. However, it is the acquisition of 194,000 hectares of arable land that truly underscores the SPP's impact on the Pasundan's agrarian landscape. This significant land bank symbolizes its unwavering dedication to agrarian reform principles and holds immense potential for both the organization and the broader socio-economic and agricultural context in which it operates. The SPP emerges as a beacon of hope, poised to continue reshaping the trajectory of rural life and agricultural development in the region. Thus, the SSE principle "primacy of people

and social purposes over the capital is the distribution of land” serves as the main strength of the SPP.

A closer examination of the organization's financial aspects¹ reveals that its primary objective is not wealth accumulation but achieving a state of equilibrium, commonly referred to as “break-even”. Nonetheless, the organization faces a crucial challenge—the absence of a comprehensive post-land acquisition economic development strategy within its core management framework, particularly concerning entrepreneurial endeavors. This deficiency stems from the prevailing leftist ideology that strongly resonates with SPP administrators and patrons, compelling them to abstain from any semblance of capitalist practices. This leftist ideological commitment is principled and commendable; however, it is not immune to scrutiny. The ever-evolving socio-economic dynamics demand adaptability, and by adhering rigidly to their ideological stance, the SPP may hinder its growth and evolution in tandem with changing times. Constructive criticism can catalyze the organization's development, enabling it to navigate the contemporary economic landscape more effectively.

As the SPP continues its vital work, it must balance its principles with the need for pragmatic economic strategies that can further its mission and benefit the farming communities it serves. It must be understood that the crucial issue is not generating a surplus - for surplus is needed to sustain the growth of the movement - but how surplus is used to serve the people’s interests. For as long as SPP adheres to the SSE tenet of the primacy of people and planet over profit, the surpluses it will generate will always be used in support of its social mission.

Feminist Qualities in SSE Entities: Agrarian Reform for Gender Equality - Women’s Participation and Influence in SPP

The profound transformation witnessed within the SPP and the socio-cultural landscape of Pasundan owes its existence to the pivotal role and engagement of women in the organization's agrarian reform

¹ All recorded in the long video-interview of SPP held on October 20, 2023

endeavors. This transformation emerged during the New Order (Orde Baru) regime, a period characterized by palpable repression of civil liberties and limited opportunities for various social groups, including women. Through the government program of Family Welfare (Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga /PKK), prescribed rigid, traditional gender roles for women, consigning them to the confines of cooking, childcare, and household responsibilities. These roles, indicative of deeply ingrained feudal labor divisions, effectively restrained the mobility and agency of women across various regions in Pasundan. Consequently, women in Pasundan were systematically excluded from active participation in the tangible development of their villages, perpetuating a socio-cultural status quo that denied them a meaningful voice in their communities.

However, with the advent of agrarian reform initiatives championed by the SPP, a paradigm shift has unfolded in the role of women. In this evolving context, the contributions and involvement of women have assumed a pivotal and transformative significance, effectively challenging the preconceived gender roles imposed by the PKK and empowering women to play an active and indispensable role in shaping the destiny of their farming communities. By dismantling the traditional barriers that once consigned women to the domestic sphere, SPP's endeavors have not only elevated the status and agency of women but have also recognized their essential contributions to the economic and social fabric of Pasundan, as well as to the achievement of decent work and the SDGs.

Herewith are two examples of gender empowerment in the SPP: First, concerning land certificates, the SPP has the policy of distributing land certificates to both men and women, with a male-to-female ratio of 60:40 currently. To date, the SPP has successfully facilitated 3,800 land certificates and 1,527 of them are under the name of female farmers. Both female farmers and the male farmers work hand in hand in obtaining land certificates. The second is the impact of the gender approach on economic activities. The consistent gender-inclusive approach of SPP has resulted in increasing participation of women in economic activities at the village level. Most of the saving and loan

activities of the SPP affiliate organizations have been initiated by the women and managed by women.

In summary, the active involvement of women in the agrarian reform efforts of the SPP stands as a testament to the transformative power of collective action in reshaping deeply entrenched gender norms and fostering more inclusive and prosperous societies. It underscores how progressive initiatives can challenge historical injustices and outdated gender roles, ultimately leading to a more equitable and inclusive future for all members of the community. SPP's gender-inclusive approach has impacted economic activities in the village such as strengthening social safety nets. This phenomenon within Pasundan serves as an inspiring example for regions worldwide, highlighting the potential for change when grassroots movements prioritize gender equality and social reform.

Financial Approach

The finance of the SPP is largely guided by the principle of self-finance. This is evident from the example of building the farmers' hall in the village of Cikalong in the district of Tasikmalaya, which was constructed based on collective saving. This became possible with the successful transfer of land titles to the farmers. The agricultural land becomes an important asset for them for livelihood and collective action.

However, at the SPP level, economic sustainability has yet to be elaborated well. Some of the young activists staff of SPP resigned as they got married to seek better income opportunities for the family. From the perspective of the SSE, the collective economy must build from the village level to the market. Collaboration among the various stakeholders of the supply chain is important in building the people's economy.

Contribution to Decent Work and the SDGs

SSE stands as a testament to the transformative potential of grassroots initiatives, where social and economic interests intersect harmoniously, echoing the broader aspirations of a more equitable

society. The SPP exemplifies this ethos through a multifaceted approach deeply aligned with the mission of agrarian reform.

Firstly, the establishment of the Sekolah SPP, comprising both primary and secondary schools for the children of SPP members, underscores the organization's commitment to promoting education and literacy. This not only empowers the younger generation of SPP's Kader (cadre) but also catalyzes intellectual growth within the community, bolstering their ability to navigate the complex world of agrarian reform effectively. Moreover, SPP's dedication to environmental protection, epitomized by their ecological activism initiatives, constitutes a vital second pillar of their mission. By engaging in ecological stewardship, they actively contribute to the sustainability of their region, recognizing the intrinsic connection between agrarian reform and environmental well-being. This conscientious approach safeguards vital natural resources, ensuring the long-term viability of agrarian practices while harmonizing with broader sustainable development goals.

Lastly, and perhaps most profoundly, SPP extends its reach to historically underserved and impoverished farmers. This includes marginalized groups that have long been excluded from economic prosperity. By providing support and a platform for these vulnerable communities, SPP effectively addresses social inequality, empowering the impoverished to elevate themselves from the cycle of poverty. In doing so, they not only reinforce the principles of agrarian reform but also champion social justice and inclusivity, embodying the essence of social solidarity within the realm of economic endeavors.

In conclusion, the SPP's multifaceted objectives manifest a commendable commitment to the SDGs, intertwined with their unwavering dedication to agrarian reform. Through education, environmental stewardship, and support for the historically disadvantaged, SPP profoundly contributes to a more just and equitable society, thereby exemplifying the ideals of the Social Solidarity Economy.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The SPP has undertaken practices and activities that realize the normative core features of an SSE entity. As a grassroots organization, the SPP has shown concrete results in agrarian reform by helping the farmers secure their right to land and full access to the fruits of their labor. Approximately 194,000 hectares of arable land have been distributed to 51.000 households in the 4 districts. Solidarity and the common interest are the strong bonds among them to reach the goal. Since its inception the SPP has been built heavily on environmental and social purposes, impacting better welfare and resilient communities. With the SSE principles, the SPP has significantly contributed to SDGs 1, 2, 4 and 5.

The agrarian movement underwent reform between two authoritarian regimes during the time of Soeharto and to the current reformation era which is more democratic. Although land distribution remains a challenge, at least there is no plantation concession given by the government in their area. Now, the challenge is how to optimize sustainable agriculture to increase the farmer's welfare. The economic activities have been started at the village level and initiated mostly by the women in forming the cooperative. However, the SPP has yet to develop a strategic plan to extend the economic potential at the village level to the broader market.

It is recommended that the SPP reviews its strategic plan and focus on enhancing economic activity in a more dynamic manner. The SPP needs to adopt SSE as a new orientation towards balancing the struggle for land, policy advocacy, and economic progress.

It is essential for SPP to have an effective advocacy and strategy for strengthening its institutional capacity as a full-pledge SSE organization. Therefore, it is suggested that this assessment could be further implemented for a broader range of stakeholders at the national level. Proper database and knowledge management will be crucial for SSE advocacy and capacity building at the national level.

**Building Inclusive Communities
through Social Enterprises and
Social Business Models**

Chapter 11

From Beneficiaries to Local SDG Champions: Income Generation Projects Empowering Local Communities through APPGM-SDG, Malaysia

Nurul Syahirah Abd Aziz, Paniirselvam Jayaraman and K. Eruthairaj

ABSTRACT

APPGM-SDG Secretariat has been forefronting grassroots solutions since 2020. Identifying the needs of the people through grounded research informs the design of feasible solutions projects with local partners. This has enabled APPGM-SDG to build grassroots leadership through solutions projects involving vulnerable communities in various locations. From 2020 to 2023, APPGM-SDG has undertaken 864 solution projects, conducted by 523 solution providers in 85 parliamentary constituencies in Malaysia. Based on the lessons learned, the need for economic projects that focus on skills-based income generation has emerged. Hence, in 2022, a new project category, income generation projects, was created with a total of 50 grant allocations open for application. These funds were ringfenced for community organizations to train participants in skills development. Since then, income generation grants have been made available annually. In 2023, 100 grant allocations were designated to provide skills-based training to vulnerable grassroots communities that will equip them to generate income. The Social Solidarity Economy (SSE) model was taken as the primary framework for project implementation. SSE-based community empowerment in income generation projects allows for the collective development of beneficiaries with the creation of shared properties, shared knowledge, and shared effort in income development. This method also builds the confidence of participants, especially women, and paves a pathway for the formation of cooperatives and social enterprises. The SSE framework and the values we uphold in this project not only bring return-of-investment (ROI) but also return-of-value (ROV) which contributes to shaping the beneficiaries as local

SDG champions. This paper will delve into the project types and details, the SSE framework adopted, value-based frameworks introduced and implemented, and lessons drawn from three case studies.

INTRODUCTION

The All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia on Sustainable Development Goals (APPGM-SDG) was formed in 2019 mirroring the UK Parliament APPGs. The purpose was to bring about a common platform among Members of Parliament regardless of political affiliation, professionals, academics and CSO members to discuss and implement programs which are beneficial to grassroots communities. This APPGM model is very unique in terms of sustainability and localizing SDGs. The APPGM-SDG plays a very crucial role in Malaysia, in terms of securing the Government's commitment to provide funding and foster engagement with planning agencies as well as CSOs as partners in advancing the SDGs localization agenda.¹ This whole-of-nation model can also be adopted by other countries to cultivate SSE and SDG models for nation building.

Since 2019, APPGM-SDG has undertaken grounded research to identify local needs. While macro-issues are highlighted at the policy level, issues that can be addressed through micro-solution projects are undertaken at the grassroots by local organizations. From 2020 to 2023, a total of 864 projects were undertaken throughout the country to address micro-issues that were identified through grounded research. These projects, categorised as economic, social or environmental, were undertaken by solution providers including CSOs committed to local empowerment. APPGM-SDG has since been

¹ Danial Mohd Yusof and Zainal Abidin Sanusi, The APPGM-SDG (All Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia on Sustainable Development Goals): Towards Mainstreaming SDG in Issues and Solution of Parliamentary Constituencies, *Journal of the Malaysian Parliament*, Vol. I (2021), pp. 228-242
<https://journalmp.parlimen.gov.my/jurnal/index.php/jmp/article/view/39/23#:~:text=The%20APPGM%2DSDG%20was%20originally,Parliament%20on%2017%20October%202019.>

working closely with 523 solution partners in implementing impactful and sustainable solution projects.

INCOME GENERATION (IG) PROJECTS

Among the 10 types of projects under the APPGM-SDG, income generation projects focus on skills-based training to create and increase earning capacities. This project was introduced in 2022 with 50 grant allocations, and was increased to 100 grant allocations in 2023, totaling 150 allocations to date. This project type aims to identify the vulnerable, offer them income-based skills development opportunities, equip them with necessary tools, and enable them to start their own business.

The project deliverables are fixed and divided into four categories, namely (i) skills-based hands-on learning, (ii) adoption of core training modules including digital marketing, financial literacy, business registration and opening of a bank account, (iii) supply of equipment through seed money, and (iv) voluntary monitoring of participants for six months after the project completion.

The seed money equipment is set at RM1,500 to RM2,000 (USD318 to USD424). The participants are required to start their income generation activity after the training and solution partners are required to do voluntary monitoring after the training is complete. This voluntary monitoring is a co-funding model introduced to solution providers as part of the empowerment model. All these four compulsory deliverables are drivers of project success and have proven to deliver high-impact output and outcomes to beneficiaries and transform them into local entrepreneurs. This interlinks with the SSE-based empowerment models. Table 11.1 outlines the 4 categories of compulsory project deliverables for income generation projects.

Table 11.1 Categories of compulsory project deliverables for income generation projects

Skills-Based Entrepreneurship Training	Digital Entrepreneurship Ecosystem and Financial Literacy Training	Seed money	Voluntary monitoring and handholding
<p>1. Participants are to be provided with hands-on training to create new income channels or to elevate existing income.</p> <p>2. Training needs to focus on entrepreneurship skills that promote income generation.</p> <p>3. Participants have to come from vulnerable communities.</p>	<p>1. Digital marketing is a compulsory module.</p> <p>2. Financial literacy and product pricing are also compulsory modules.</p> <p>3. Participants are to be introduced to business registration and opening a bank account.</p> <p>4. Participants must be informed of business loans available such as TEKUN, AIM, and State government loans.</p>	<p>1. The seed money can be utilized through 3 methods:</p> <p>(i) purchase equipment for individuals to kickstart and grow their business (business development). Equipment can vary depending on the needs.</p> <p>(ii) set up common shared properties for a group of participants to utilize and earn, such as a community kitchen, garden, and more.</p> <p>(ii) part of the seed money can</p>	<p>1. Solution providers are required to conduct post-project monitoring and handholding for participants voluntarily.</p> <p>2. Initiate mentor-mentee, peer support or self-help groups.</p> <p>3. Keep a monthly monitoring record of participants' income and emotional management.</p> <p>4. This voluntary monitoring is a co-funding model introduced to solution providers in line</p>

	5. Participants also need to be introduced to Google Business, apps such as Grab and Food Panda, payment gateways, and other latest business trends.	also be used as the capital to purchase products produced by participants during the training.	with our solution providers empowerment model.
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Source: APPGM-SDG (December 2023)

These 150 IG projects are aimed at creating greater resilience among the beneficiaries as well as the solution partners. The projects are targeted specifically for vulnerable communities and solution partners are required to have the expertise and capacity to fulfill the project deliverables.

SOLUTION PARTNERS

Solution partners play a crucial role as partners to APPGM-SDG in bringing this economic solution to the beneficiaries. These registered organizations are committed souls that bring change to the beneficiaries in the long-term. They not only conduct the projects with the funds given but also conduct voluntary monitoring of the beneficiaries after the project period is complete as a co-funding mechanism. This arrangement brings high sustainability to the project and ultimately increases the retention rate of beneficiaries in their income generation activities. Table 11.2 lists the types of organizations conducting IG projects in the years 2022 and 2023.

Table 11.2 Types of organizations and number of projects (2022 - 2023)

Types of Organizations	Number of IG Projects
Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs)	59
Social Enterprises and Companies	80
Universities	7
Youth Organizations	2
Cooperatives	2
TOTAL	150

Source: APPGM-SDG (December 2023)

THE BENEFICIARIES

The 150 income generation projects undertaken since 2022 have significantly impacted the beneficiaries. Each project has a minimum of 10 beneficiaries, achieving a total of 1,500 beneficiaries under this initiative. The beneficiaries are identified based on their business and skills needs. Women form the majority of beneficiaries, with 85 IG projects focused on women's economic development. Youths have benefited from 29 projects. This is in line with APPGM-SDG's issue mapping of needs where women and youth are the most vulnerable in our community.

Apart from that, other beneficiaries include small traders, people with disabilities (PWDs), villagers, former drug users in rehabilitation, fishers, flat dwellers, refugees, and indigenous peoples. The voluntary monitoring and handholding post-project completion have promoted project sustainability and ensured that beneficiaries continued or started their income generation activity after the training period. Table

11.3 captures the types of beneficiaries and the project numbers for the years 2022 and 2023.

Table 11.3 Types of beneficiaries and number of IG projects (2022 - 2023)

Categories of Beneficiaries	Number of IG projects
Women	85
Youth	29
Small traders	19
People with disabilities (PWDs)	6
Villagers	2
Former drug users in rehabilitation	3
Indigenous peoples	2
Fishers	1
Farmers	1
Flat dwellers	1
Refugees	1
TOTAL	150

Source: APPGM-SDG (December 2023)

INTERLINKAGES BETWEEN THE 7 CORE FEATURES OF SSE AND INCOME GENERATION PROJECTS

SSE principles are one of the fundamental foundations of our solution projects along with social work principles, and the SDG targets and indicators. Exposure to SSE for the secretariat staff and the solution partners is vital in order to create a just and shared ecosystem that enables greater sharing of knowledge and resources in a collective manner to all the parties in the ecosystem. The design of the income

generation projects is planned with all of the three frameworks integrated into the project design. The solution partners are empowered to deliver this project type based on the three major principles. Let us analyse the interlinkages between project design, solution partners and beneficiaries based on the 7 core SSE features.

Engaged in Economic Activities

This is a fundamental feature of the income generation projects. The project objective itself is to transform beneficiaries, who are mostly non-businesswomen into income-earning entrepreneurs. From the earlier analysis of beneficiaries, we can see that there are 11 vulnerable segments of community such as women, youth, small traders, fishers, farmers and more. Transforming them to engage in business entities will eventually make them financially-savvy.

Primacy of People and Social Purpose over Capital in the Distribution and Use of Surplus/Profits as well as Assets

Our income generation projects are divided into two major categories. The first is projects that cater to the personal development of beneficiaries through the four compulsory project deliverables. The beneficiaries in this project are given adequate training and equipment to start their entrepreneurial journey. They will be monitored regularly by the solution partner.

The second category is the distribution and use of surplus, profit, and assets. A total of 50 projects out of the 150 income generation projects are focused on creating shared spaces and shared equipments. A common space such as a community hall, rented space and other available venues will be equipped with equipments based on the project objectives for shared use by the beneficiaries. The shared equipments will benefit the existing beneficiaries as well as future beneficiaries, which will be trained by the existing beneficiaries.

As of end 2023, around 50 centers have been set up for sewing, bakery, agricultural, digital content creation projects and many others serving as a sustainable solution for the long-term benefit of the community. An example is “Dapur Komuniti”, a community bakery

kitchen, which was set up for divorced young housewives whose ex-husbands are frequent drug users. The centers were developed in December 2022 and the skills imparted created new income streams for them, building them up as local champions of the project. Today, the center is fully managed by the local champions and paid classes are ongoing organised and conducted by these women.²

Contribution to Decent Work and the SDGs

The abovementioned 50 projects focused on creating a shared space, uses the seed money allocated within the project fund, amounting to USD4,000 (RM20,000). This is contributed back to the community to allow more individuals to grow to be skilful entrepreneurs. The solution providers or project delivery partners are only allocated 10% of the total project fund for the project administration and 20% is allocated for expert trainers. The remaining 70% of the project fund goes back to the beneficiaries in line with SDG 8 on decent work.

In addition, all our income generation project beneficiaries are monitored for a minimum of six months after the project is completed. This is to ensure that the beneficiaries start their business and are able to earn income. The solution partners are encouraged to hold periodical meetup sessions with participants to hear their stories on best practices and challenges and work together to ensure their goals are achieved. These post-project commitments are put in place to ensure sustainability of the projects in line with the SDGs. A record of income, happiness record, activity of whole week or month and additional engagements are among the measurement used to track the participants upon the completion of the project.³

² Pertubuhan Kebajikan Masyarakat Marhaen Taiping - KMM. 2024. *Pertubuhan Kebajikan Masyarakat Marhaen Taiping - KMM*. 25 February. Accessed 30 April, 2024. <https://www.facebook.com/share/kmq1Na1tuHXU7o6T/?mibextid=WC7FNe>.

³ APPGM-SDG. n.d. "Personal Report Card." *APPGM_SDG Proposal Briefing & Templates*. Accessed on 30 April 2024. https://docs.google.com/document/d/16MHIBZbX5Cg8Kbq85tBKwB1NYB8bWOIJ_ZTfX3HXS6o/edit.

Mutual Aid

In terms of mutual aid, this year (2024), APPGM-SDG has started a new grant category called the beneficiaries grant. This program is similar to mutual aid and the Grameen model program, which will be dedicated to existing beneficiaries to provide them with business development grants. This grant will help scale up their business and this aid will be given through the solution partners. Apart from this, APPGM-SDG has also initiated the National Solution Providers Network (SOLNET) which consists of all our 523 solution partners. One of the founding objectives is to look into sustainability and mutual aid among the solution partners. We have started with capacity building programs on equity building and bankable organisations. In addition, social entrepreneurship training is also underway to create income opportunities for these social organisations.

Voluntary Cooperation

The beneficiaries in the income generation projects are allowed to decide on what type of skills development they require and are also allowed to choose session days. This enables greater project ownership and increases their participation in the empowerment process. We are also encouraging them to form cooperatives among the beneficiaries. At the time of writing, we have one cooperative successfully formed under our guidance by the beneficiaries.⁴ An additional 2 cooperatives are in the process of registration. Apart from cooperatives, social enterprises are also underway with capacity building and formation of social enterprise by 10 solution partners to promote social entrepreneurship.

Democratic and/or Participatory Governance

This feature is most evidently practised by our solution partners and beneficiaries. The solution providers are given the liberty to choose the type of solution they can provide to the community, which is

⁴APPGM-SDG. 2024. *APPGM-SDG Facebook Page*. 18 April. Accessed on 30 April 2024. <https://www.facebook.com/share/zG5X4M5cm3VLAMnk/?mibextid=WC7FNe>.

decided during engagement sessions with the beneficiaries. This increases their confidence in delivery. Through this participatory process, the beneficiaries are able to decide on the type of empowerment they need. This results in a greater sense of project ownership, and increases motivation and participation.

The seed money disbursement for equipments are also decided upon by the beneficiaries on what items are needed apart from what they already have. This allows participatory governance of seed money utilisation and equipment or asset purchase. In a digital marketing income generation program, some participants requested for laptops while others needed a smartphone. Such flexibility is needed to ensure project goals are achieved.

Autonomy and Independence

The 50 income generation projects that developed common spaces are managed by the beneficiaries upon completion of the project. This ensures autonomy and independence among beneficiaries in managing the shared space and maximising the usage of space and equipments with additional training and income. A good example is a project in Jerlun, Kedah where we developed a common space for sales and marketing, managed by the beneficiaries together with the solution partner. The sales for the beneficiaries has increased and the common space is now acting as a psychosocial support centre for beneficiaries.⁵

Taken together, all seven SSE features are integrated into our income generating projects objectives and deliverables. The adoption of SSE features into our projects has created sustainable impact. These learnings are now planted in the hearts of our solution providers and beneficiaries. We believe they will join APPGM-SDG to uphold common collective agendas throughout Malaysia.

⁵ K. Eruthairaj and Nur Balqis Osman. 2023. "Income Generation Projects: Generating Income for the Marginalised Community." In *SDG Policies and Practices in Malaysia*, edited by Teo Lee Ken and Debbie Loh, 204-218. (Petaling Jaya, Selangor: Persatuan Promosi Matlamat Pembangunan Lestari).

KEY LESSONS IN ADOPTING THE SOCIAL SOLIDARITY ECONOMY FRAMEWORK INTO THE APPGM-SDG INCOME GENERATION PROJECTS

Importance of empowering communities

This to encourage comities to actively participate in economic decision-making. When local communities have a say in shaping their economic activities, there is a greater likelihood of sustainable development that meets the specific needs of the people.

Social inclusion and equity

SSE emphasizes the need for economic models that prioritize social inclusion and equity. By promoting cooperative and collaborative structures, SSE has shown that it is possible to create economic systems that reduce disparities and provide fair opportunities for all participants.

Environmental responsibility

SSE underlines the significance of integrating environmental sustainability into economic practices. By incorporating eco-friendly approaches, such as promoting sustainable production and consumption, SSE contributes to minimizing the ecological impact of economic activities.

Democratic decision-making

SSE underscores the importance of democratic decision-making processes in organizations. When workers, consumers, and stakeholders have a say in the decision-making process, it leads to a more inclusive and accountable economic system.

Resilience and localism

SSE has demonstrated the resilience of local economies and the importance of supporting locally-driven initiatives. By focusing on local production, consumption, and community development, SSE models contribute to building resilient economies that are less susceptible to global economic shocks.

Alternative financial models

SSE has experimented with alternative financial models that prioritize social and environmental impact over financial gains. This includes community-based banking, micro finance, and ethical investment, showcasing that there are alternative ways to fund and support initiatives that align with broader societal goals.

Ethical consumption and production

SSE encourages individuals to be more conscious consumers, making choices that align with ethical and sustainable practices. This lesson is crucial in promoting responsible consumption patterns that take into account the social and environmental impact of products and services.

Collaboration over competition

Unlike traditional economic models that often emphasize competition, SSE emphasizes collaboration and cooperation. This lesson highlights that fostering partnerships and collective efforts can lead to more sustainable and inclusive economic outcomes.

Value of solidarity

SSE teaches the value of solidarity among individuals and communities. By fostering a sense of shared responsibility and mutual support, SSE models contribute to building stronger social bonds that extend beyond purely economic considerations.

Adaptability and innovation

SSE often involves innovative approaches. The ability to adapt and innovate is a valuable lesson for creating a global economy that supports new ideas and innovation for future generations.

THE APPGM-SDG EMPOWERMENT FRAMEWORKS ALONGSIDE SSE FRAMEWORK

APPGM-SDG adopted model frameworks developed through our 5 years of grassroots communities building experience. These models focus on empowerment for both solution providers and beneficiaries,

and align with the SSE framework in terms of focusing on the shared economy as an end goal.

SOLUTION PROVIDERS EMPOWERMENT MODEL

The solution providers empowerment model is a framework developed by APPGM-SDG. It is a three-tier model that starts with solution partners entering our ecosystem as grant recipients. At this first stage, they undergo various capacity building, namely proposal writing, gender budgeting, digital inclusion, impact measurement, and more.

This is followed by the second stage where they become solution partners. As solution partners, the organizations will need to commit and be involved in various trainings and will be offered opportunities to conduct co-funding projects with APPGM-SDG. Building inclusive communities (BIC) and income generation projects are some of the co-funding projects in APPGM-SDG. The trainings they normally undergo include grant proposal writing and application to external grant providers, introduction and networking with external funders, and other valuable opportunities. Solution partners at this stage will also be nominated for the annual SDG Leadership Award to encourage their sustainable efforts and contribution towards grassroots solutions.

At stage three, they advance to become project owners. Here, they manage projects independently, with or without grants from APPGM-SDG. At this stage, receiving grants will not be the primary focus of the organization, instead building equity through social enterprises and cooperative social solidarity models become the priority. An organization at this stage will be independent in terms of securing and generating funds.⁶ This three-tier model has driven solution providers to be independent local champions of SDGs in line with social work principles. This model is also in line with the SSE framework which promotes alternative financial options through the formation of

⁶ James Ryan Raj and Paniirselvam (eds). 2023. *SDG Solution Projects: Best Practices Impacting the Grassroots* (Petaling Jaya: Persatuan Promosi Matlamat Pembangunan Lestari)

cooperative and collective development with an increased level of resilience and solidarity among solution partners and the beneficiaries. Figure 11.1 illustrates the three-tier empowerment model.



Figure 11.1 Solution Partners Empowerment Model
 Source: APPGM-SDG

BENEFICIARIES PARTICIPATORY MODEL

This beneficiaries participatory model is another SSE-based framework developed and adopted internally at APPGM-SDG (Figure 11.2). The key element to achieve through this model is the relationship and trust building in creating local champions among beneficiaries of the projects.



Figure 11.2 Beneficiaries Participatory Model
 Source: APPGM-SDG

The first stage in this process is building consensus with communities. This marks the beginning of the trust building process. Local organisations (solution providers) that are already known among the community members would easily achieve this stage compared to

new organisations, which will require time to gain confidence and consensus.

The next stage will be active participation. This can be achieved by involving members of the community in project management. For example, a project for an indigenous community appointed an informal community leader as the head of participants. She ensured the attendance of all participants at each session and was given an allowance from the project funding. With active participation, the empowerment process can take place smoothly.

With this, the next level involves moving beneficiaries to take ownership and commitment. Both can be created when the participants have high confidence in the project and in the local providers who are running it. Such ownership is key to project sustainability and implementing SSE models such as cooperatives and social enterprises to foster greater project ownership.

Inclusion is fostered when a solution provider engages with a group of beneficiaries through all the three stages, within the project parameters. Inclusion includes cooperative models adopted which do not discriminate against others from participating and have a strong common goal. Such an understanding and inclusive mindset will prompt more beneficial programs.

Both models play a crucial role in empowering and increasing the participation of both our solution partners and the beneficiaries. These two models have enabled impactful grassroots solutions for the beneficiaries and enabled them to contribute collectively based on SSE principles to nation building. Many lessons and way forward ideas were identified through income generation projects. Three case studies are shared below as impact assessments for the said income generation projects.

CASE STUDY 1: KOMITED MALAYSIA'S DRUG REHAB CAR WASH INITIATIVE: BRIDGING THE GAP TO EMPOWER RECOVERING DRUG ADDICTS

The Komited Malaysia Drug Rehab Car Wash initiative is a groundbreaking project aimed at providing recovering drug addicts with opportunities for rehabilitation, knowledge acquisition, and skill development through the car wash business. Managed and supervised by Komited Malaysia, this program seeks to reduce the gap between recovering drug addicts and society by generating supplemental income, offering career opportunities, and enhancing the overall quality of life for the participants. The project and the partner fits all 7 core features of SSE.

The primary objective of the project initiative is to empower recovering drug addicts by equipping them with knowledge and skills training related to the car wash business. By doing so, the project aims to facilitate the reintegration of participants into society, reduce societal stigmas, and provide a sustainable source of income for those undergoing rehabilitation.

The need for such a program arose from the ongoing rehabilitation and career guidance efforts for drug addicts. Understanding that knowledge of the car wash industry can contribute to a more meaningful life for recovering addicts, the initiative seeks to bridge the gap between their current situation and successful reintegration into the community.

The participants are trained with essential life skills such as punctuality, discipline, communication, and emotional management. Additionally, participants are exposed to career therapy, fostering a supportive environment that motivates them to continue their recovery journey. The program aims to make a positive impact on the participants, transforming them into valuable members of society over an extended period of time.

This initiative not only provides recovering drug addicts with a source of income but also helps improve their soft skills, creating opportunities for personal and professional growth. Participants become exemplars for others in the community, breaking down stereotypes associated with addiction. The initiative also builds strong relationships with customers, including local communities and government agencies, leading to regular business and community support.

The beneficiaries experience improved lifestyles and gain the ability to generate income through their work at the car wash center. The center, in turn, develops a loyal customer base, including local communities and government agencies like Yayasan Pahang, fostering economic sustainability and community integration.

The Komited Malaysia Drug Rehab Car Wash initiative exemplifies a holistic approach to drug addiction rehabilitation, addressing not only the recovery process but also the societal reintegration of individuals. By providing meaningful employment and skills development, the program not only benefits the recovering addicts but also creates a positive impact on the community at large. Through the implementation of such initiatives, Komited Malaysia contributes to the achievement of the SDGs and helps transform the lives of recovering drug addicts, fostering a more inclusive and compassionate society.

CASE STUDY 2: PSPK EMPOWERING WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS: A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO COMMUNITY UPLIFTMENT

The Association of Social Services and Community Development of Gombak (PSPK), in collaboration with the All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia on Sustainable Development Goals (APPGM-SDG), has undertaken a transformative initiative to empower women entrepreneurs in the B40 community of Selayang. PSPK is the classic model of SSE-based empowerment of the local community. This project focuses on enhancing social mobility through education, skills training, and improved job placement, to build sustainable income

and create new employment opportunities for individuals in marginalized communities.

The primary objective of the initiative is to uplift women entrepreneurs and small/micro businesses in the B40 community by providing advanced skills training, fostering sustainable income generation, and promoting self-reliance. The project seeks to address challenges such as limited prior knowledge, reliance on conventional business methods, and the need for tailored support to ensure comprehension of business concepts.

The initiative targets women entrepreneurs in the B40 community, recognizing their struggles with knowledge gaps, financial constraints, and limited social support. By focusing on this group, the project aims to bring about positive social change and economic empowerment.

Many women entrepreneurs in the B40 community face challenges in growing their businesses due to a lack of knowledge and skills. The project acknowledges the importance of community involvement in the planning and implementation process, ensuring alignment with community needs and preferences. The initiative strives to address these issues and provide tailored support to help women entrepreneurs thrive in the Selayang constituency.

PSPK and APPGM-SDG collaborated with women entrepreneurs from the B40 community to design an upskilling program. The initiative included targeted programs to enhance participants' technological literacy and practical skills in areas such as design, printing, marketing, baking, coffee-making, and business management. The learning sessions were hands-on and interactive, fostering a conducive environment for skills development.

Networking opportunities were created during business sessions, allowing participants to engage with mentors, potential sponsors, and representatives from relevant agencies. As a result of this initiative, participants have found new opportunities in various sectors. For instance, one participant secured a position in the hospitality industry

at EQ Kuala Lumpur Hotel, a luxury hotel near the Kuala Lumpur City Centre (KLCC). Others took up roles in production and management at Bites n' Beans Cafe. Additionally, e-commerce marketing has enabled some women entrepreneurs to sell their food products online, expanding their reach and customer base.

The PSPK initiative stands as a testament to the positive impact that targeted skills training and community involvement can have on women entrepreneurs in marginalized communities. By addressing knowledge gaps, fostering skills development, and providing networking opportunities, the project has successfully contributed to social mobility, economic empowerment, and the overall well-being of women entrepreneurs in the B40 community of Selayang. Through such holistic approaches, PSPK continues to play a vital role in community development, aligning with the broader goals of sustainable development and social progress.

CASE STUDY 3: ATHANLIZ ENTERPRISE'S CAFETERIA INITIATIVE: FOSTERING COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND ECONOMIC RESILIENCE IN KANGAR, PERLIS

Athanliz Enterprise has embarked on a transformative initiative to generate income for the local community in Kangar, Perlis, by reviving an unused cafeteria. Through collaborations with APPGM-SDG and the Jabatan Pertanian Negeri Perlis (Perlis State Agricultural Agency), Athanliz aspires to establish the first Harumanis-based (mango species) cafeteria in Perlis. This has great potential to become a tourism hub that showcases local products and creates a sustainable source of income for the local community.

The primary objective of the project is to create job opportunities for the local community by transforming an underutilized cafeteria into a thriving business center. Athanliz Enterprise seeks to empower 10 participants with culinary skills, digital marketing, and cafe management expertise, allowing them to generate income and become aspiring cafeteria entrepreneurs.

The 10 participants selected for training not only acquired cooking and baking skills but also gained knowledge in digital marketing, barista techniques, and food handling skills. They underwent comprehensive training in digital marketing, bakery and pastry techniques, food handling, and barista skills.

Four participants have successfully obtained barista certification, adding to the diverse skill set within the group. Two participants have also started to receive increased orders after joining this project because they were guided by the solution provider on the best techniques to promote their products. The project has also successfully penetrated larger markets, such as Mydin, a hypermarket, with its food products. This project's impact has garnered attention from the State government, aligned with the Year of Visiting Perlis 2024/2025.

The cafeteria aims to become a tourism hub, attracting visitors and generating income for the surrounding communities. The strategic location of the cafe further enhances its potential as a central point for tourists and locals alike. To minimize costs, the solution provider strategically purchased used items, such as coffee machines, for the cafeteria.

Athanliz Enterprise's Cafeteria initiative exemplifies a community-centered approach to economic revitalization. By leveraging local resources, empowering individuals with skills, and creating a hub for culinary innovation, the project not only addresses economic challenges but also contributes to cultural preservation and tourism development. This initiative stands as a beacon of hope, showcasing the potential for grassroots initiatives to foster community development and resilience in the face of economic adversity.

CONCLUSION

The globally accepted SSE framework is foundational to the two models developed by APPGM-SDG to empower specific communities, the solution providers and the beneficiaries. These models have paved the way for the creation of income generation projects that have high

sustainability through specific project deliverables including the handholding requirement. To continue this sustainability for the long-term, a sharpened focus towards forming SSE entities such as cooperatives. These will function as alternative financial options for community growth towards creating a highly resilient and independent society. The poor know the solution to the problem they face, and our duty is to facilitate the solution together with them and empower them towards collective and sustainable development.

Chapter 12

Sustainable Livelihoods for Small-Scale Artisans and Producers through DEW Crafts, Bangladesh

Shah Abdus Salam

INTRODUCTION

DEW Crafts is a social enterprise and sister concern of Development Wheel (DEW), a non-profit charity that aims to contribute to the socio-economic development of Bangladesh. Established in 2016, the goal of DEW Crafts is to preserve cultural heritage, promote traditional Bangladeshi handmade crafts made with biodegradable raw materials, and provide local artists with sustainable income opportunities. DEW Crafts is a Certified Guaranteed Fair Trade Social Enterprise by the World Fair Trade Organization (WFTO).

The main focus of Dew Crafts' work is the promotion of sustainable livelihoods for small-scale artisans and producers in Bangladesh by facilitating the development of small enterprises with the aim of generating sustainable self-employment opportunities for underprivileged rural and urban people, especially women. DEW Crafts is also active in the fields of climate change, livelihoods security, agricultural promotion, and women empowerment in partnership and collaboration with different international and local buyers and development partners with a vision of helping build a society where all people will enjoy equal rights, equitable access to employment and adequate resources necessary for their livelihoods and live in dignity.

Dew Crafts' Mission is to contribute to socio-economic development in Bangladesh by promoting Fairtrade options for small producers in the sector of arts, crafts, and agriculture. By promoting natural and eco-friendly products, DEW Crafts contributes to creating a more environmentally-conscious society for future generations. In collaboration with fair trade buyers and donors, Dew Crafts also provides continuous support to the producer groups with product

development, design, quality enhancement, market access, skills development training, credit, education, humanitarian support services, and measures for climate change adaptation and environmental protection.

Key Objectives and Activities

DEW Craft's primary objectives include:

- **Empowering Artisans:** DEW Crafts aims to empower local artisans, particularly women, by providing them with a platform to showcase their skills and generate income.
- **Preserving Traditional Crafts:** DEW Crafts is committed to preserving and promoting traditional and eco-friendly Bangladeshi crafts such as handloom weaving, pottery, hand embroidery and bamboo crafts.
- **Economic Development:** DEW Crafts contributes to the economic development of the communities it serves by creating a sustainable market for its products.

Operational Activities

DEW Crafts engages in the following operational activities:

- **Artisan Support:** It offers training and skill development opportunities to artisans (80% are female), enhancing their craft skills and knowledge.
- **Product Development:** DEW Craft collaborates with artisans to design and create market-driven products that blend traditional techniques with modern aesthetics.
- **Market Access:** DEW Crafts connect artisans to national and international markets, facilitating the sale of their products physically and virtually.

EMBRACING THE CORE FEATURES OF SSE ENTITIES

Engaged in Economic Activities

DEW Crafts sources most of its income from trading of Fairtrade products and providing capacity building support to other farmers organizations/enterprises, augmented in part by donations and grants. Its main product line is handmade products produced by local

women. Currently, the organization is making very little profit due to various challenges.

Primacy of People over Profit

DEW Crafts is committed to prioritizing social and environmental goals in development projects in order to play a part in co-creating a more equitable, sustainable, and environmentally conscious global community. Although profit is not ignored, it is viewed as a tool rather than an aim in and of itself to accomplish larger goals.

DEW Crafts keeps accurate records of each activity. It adheres to precise standards and protocols for the creation, archiving, retrieval, and maintenance of documents. Using version control, uniform templates, and electronic document management systems are some examples of this. DEW also makes certain that every employee understands the need for paperwork. Effective documentation procedures ultimately improve accountability, lower risks, increase operational efficiency, and support an organization's long-term viability.

DEW Crafts' strong dedication to social development and environmental conservation is conveyed through the donation of all of its surplus funds to its mother charity organization, Development Wheel, which extends humanitarian aid and supports social welfare programs, and environmental conservation measures. This strategy is in line with Dew Crafts' impact-oriented and mission-driven business practices.

Contribution to Decent Work and the SDGs

Since its inception, DEW Crafts has been actively involved in creating sustainable employment and income generation opportunities for the disadvantaged artisan groups (especially for women) in rural and urban areas through promotion of their arts and crafts in the Fair Trade markets. DEW Crafts assists poor women in using their traditional craftsmanship to develop demand-driven handicrafts and provides them with market linkage support to ensure the fair return of their products. Besides supporting the vulnerable and effort to

reduce poverty, DEW Crafts always ensures gender equity within the workplace. It organizes various capacity building and awareness-raising activities, particularly for women to increase their awareness about their rights and gender equity.

DEW Crafts is involved in different SDG alliances locally and globally, while its mother organization, Development Wheel, is one of the active members of the Bangladesh Coalition on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). ADD International, Christian Aid, Dan Church Aid, and Help Age International with support from CIVICUS have formed the Bangladesh Coalition on the SDG to demystify the SDG and Leave No One Behind (LNOB) concept among the civil society organizations, policymakers, religious and ethnic minorities, Dalits, women, people with disabilities, aged, youth, trade unions, LGBTQI and rural communities. Prioritizing historically marginalized and vulnerable groups is in line with Development Wheel's social and environmental justice approach, which focuses on small farmers, rural workers, Indigenous people, and local communities as the primary beneficiaries of its activities.

DEW Crafts is always open to include among its suppliers' new artisans, especially women from disadvantaged groups and marginalized communities, who are willing to work with the organization. It ensures a safe, women-friendly working environment so that artisans can work in a healthy environment. It makes available different facilities like daycare centers for the well-being of the working mother artisans.

By ensuring fair wages, safe working conditions, and access to markets, DEW Crafts maintains its adherence to the 10 Fair Trade principles of World Fair Trade Organization, which contributes to decent work and 10 of the 17 SDG goals. This is particularly evident in the economic empowerment of women who play a significant role in craft production. By generating employment opportunities, guaranteeing just remuneration, and sustaining livelihoods, DEW Crafts contributes to the reduction of poverty. By empowering women artisans, providing leadership opportunities for women, and ensuring

their active involvement in the workforce, DEW Crafts strongly advances gender equality. The organization's emphasis on female empowerment is in line with SDG 5, which calls for the eradication of gender inequality and the empowerment of all women and girls.

As a Guaranteed Fair Trade Social Enterprise, Dew Crafts follows the core principle of Fair Trade of ensuring a safe and healthy environment at the workplace, which conforms well with ILO's fundamental principles and rights at work that provides for a safe and healthy working environment for the workers.

Mutual Aid

DEW Crafts and Development Wheel (DEW) has extensive experience in humanitarian crisis response. Following the devastation caused by the floods in the northern area of Bangladesh, DEW gave robust support to the government's recovery and rehabilitation efforts. DEW addressed the immediate needs of the affected population while also building long-term resilience of the affected communities through capacity building initiatives. Since the northern region is thought to be the most earthquake-prone, DEW conducted several awareness-raising campaigns in the region. It consistently carries out several studies on reducing the effects of climate change and how to build communities that are climate resilient by utilizing traditional methods.

Voluntary Cooperation

Development Wheel (DEW) and DEW Crafts provide internship and voluntary employment opportunities to young students wishing to work in the field of development under its Development Internship Program. As a Fair Trade organization, DEW also facilitates the services of national and international interns from the Fashion Design schools in developing new product designs for the benefit of disadvantaged artisan groups. It also conducts hands-on training for new artisans who want to join DEW crafts as fair trade product suppliers.

Democratic and/or Participatory Governance

Overall, the combination of DEW Crafts as a shareholding company and Development Wheel, a membership/mass-based organization,

provides opportunities for effective governance, participatory decision-making, and regulatory compliance. It allows both entities to contribute to their social and environmental missions while maintaining alignment with the government regulations.

FEMINIST QUALITIES OF THE ORGANIZATION

DEW Crafts' mission and vision statement reflects its commitment to addressing intersecting forms of discrimination and advancing gender equality and women's rights. The organization constantly seeks to address and overcome the underlying discriminatory structures, including patriarchy and gendered power dynamics. Its mother organization, Development Wheel, currently endeavors to strengthen the leadership capability of the women artisans among Fair Trade organizations. It continues to create a women-friendly work environment.

Altruism, care and concern for others, nurturing, and generosity, are an integral part of the principles and practices of DEW Crafts. These attributes contribute to the development of an economic, social, and employee-friendly atmosphere inside the company that is more inclusive and equal. DEW Crafts always shows selfless concern for the well-being of its employees in view of its adherence to Fair Trade ethical principles. For example, DEW Crafts ensures that the producers get fair wages and also ensures safe working conditions for artisans, particularly women who often make up a significant portion of the craft industry.

The work culture at DEW Crafts is one of compassion and care for others. This entails appreciating the crafts' cultural relevance and the frequently invisible labor that goes into making them.

DEW Crafts believes that the act of nurturing is central to many aspects of craft production. DEW Crafts nurtures the development of appropriate skills among women artisans by acknowledging their efforts, time commitment, and inventiveness in their work, and recognizing their meticulous devotion to their craft which frequently goes unappreciated and unacknowledged.

DEW Crafts continuously makes efforts to share skills, knowledge, and resources with the poor and marginalized in communities. It provides supporting skill-sharing and cooperative approaches to craft production that can empower individuals, especially women, to become more economically independent and improve their livelihoods. Knowledge-sharing plays an important role in increased economic opportunities and personal growth.

ANALYSIS

SSE Core Features

Prioritizing the social and environmental mission over profit in the context of development is a key feature of what is often referred to as "impact-driven" or "mission-driven" development. This approach places the well-being of people and the planet at the forefront of economic and social initiatives. Through this approach, DEW Crafts ensures that the values and principles of its development initiative align with its social and environmental mission. This alignment is reflected in the organization's culture, policies, and practices. It also establishes a clear and concise mission statement that articulates the social and environmental goals of our development project. Also, it embraces ethical and sustainable business practices that reflect the mission of DEW Crafts, which includes fair labor practices, environmentally friendly processes, and responsible sourcing. DEW Crafts considers the long-term sustainability of its development efforts. Prioritizing the social and environmental mission often involves making investments that are expected to pay off over time, rather than short-term profits. The approach also ensures that the local producer communities receive the optimum benefit from our initiatives. Our approaches also include job creation, community development projects, and education and training programs.

Feminist Qualities of the Organization

DEW Crafts is an organization dedicated to crafting and design, emphasizing a commitment to feminist values, including altruism, care and concern for others, nurturing, and generosity.

Altruism is demonstrated by DEW Crafts in terms of placing a high value on the welfare, fair treatment and respect of its artists. For its mostly female workforce, the company guarantees safe working conditions and fair wages, creating equal opportunities for women and men. Altruism at DEW Crafts has strengthened the social fabric and produced a positive work atmosphere. Artisans are motivated and feel appreciated, which results in superior products and a committed staff.

DEW Crafts respects the cultural significance of its crafts and recognizes the often underappreciated labor that goes into making them. *Care and concern* for the women artisans advance diversity and gender equality in the company. DEW Crafts has promoted a culture of appreciation and respect for the frequently overlooked work of women by appreciating the contributions of artisans. As a result, the artisans feel more a part of the fair trade community.

DEW Crafts cares for and encourages the growth or development of women artisans by fostering skills development and support with personal and professional growth. This has enabled the women artisans to achieve their creative potential and make a living. They develop their confidence, skills, and knowledge, which promote independence and self-sufficiency as well as leadership.

DEW Crafts demonstrates *generosity* by sharing knowledge, resources, and opportunities within its communities. Cooperative approaches and skill-sharing contribute to the economic and social well-being of local communities. Generosity has strengthened community bonds and created a sense of solidarity among the local population. It has also contributed to the economic growth of these communities.

Consistently upholding these feminist values strengthens DEW Crafts' relationship with the women artisans. This promotes gender equity and fosters a more inclusive and equitable society. The impact of these feminist qualities is evident in the organization's positive work environment, empowered artisans, inclusive practices, and community support. DEW Crafts serves as a commendable example

of how feminist values can be applied in a business context to create a positive social and economic impact.

DEW Crafts' Financing Approach

DEW Crafts relies mainly on its income from trading of Fairtrade products to finance its business operations as well as its capacity building support for its suppliers. Income from fair trade business is sustainable for as long as the company maintains ethical business practices, accountability, transparency in financial management, and consistency with its social and environmental objectives. Through the continuous enhancement of this approach, DEW Crafts can maintain a sound financial performance and fulfill its broader objectives of social and environmental accountability.

DEW Crafts' Contributions to Decent Work and the SDGs

DEW Crafts' dedication to the 10 Principles of Fair Trade enables the company to make modest contributions to a number of SDGs (Figure 12.1). This includes Opportunities for Disadvantaged Producers (SDG 1), Transparency and Accountability (SDG 2), Fair Trade practices (SDG 3), Fair payment (SDG 4), Decent Work, No child labour, No forced labour (SDG 5), No Discrimination, Gender Equity (SDG 6), Good Working Conditions (SDG 7), Capacity Building (SDG 8), Promoting Fair Trade (SDG 9), and Respect for the Environment (SDG 10). The example of DEW Crafts demonstrates how a socially-conscious company can advance Decent Work and the SDGs and influence the development of society for the better.



Figure 12.1 Ten Principles of Fair Trade directly contributing to 10 SDGs

DEW Crafts uses various Fair Trade approaches to benefit local community groups, such as providing training and education programs, facilitating market access, advocating for policy changes, supporting local initiatives, and partnering with local organizations and governments. Additionally, DEW Crafts engages the women artisans in its decision-making processes to ensure that their needs and priorities are considered in the company's development initiatives.

CHALLENGES

While DEW Crafts has made remarkable progress, it faces several challenges as well.

One of DEW Crafts' biggest challenges is continuing to be financially viable while providing fair compensation and safe working conditions for artists. The firm strives to be financially viable while offering respectable employment opportunities. The dedication of DEW Crafts to Fair Trade and decent labor frequently results in increased production costs. This can present financial difficulties in a competitive market.

Ensuring artisans have the necessary skills for high-quality products is essential for DEW Crafts, but it can be time-consuming and resource-intensive. Skills development programs require investments in training and mentorship. These commitments often face logistical and financial constraints.

Ensuring transparency in the supply chain to uphold Fair Trade standards and ethical sourcing practices is a complex endeavor. Maintaining transparency in the supply chain could be challenging due to the global nature of the crafts industry and varying degrees of accountability among suppliers.

Economic fluctuations and market unpredictability can affect income stability for artisans and challenge DEW Crafts' commitment to fair wages. Market uncertainty, especially in artisanal crafts, may result in income variations, impacting the economic stability of artisans.

Disasters and natural calamities can hamper the supply chain of raw materials because DEW Crafts uses 100% eco-friendly, natural and raw materials. The migration of skilled artisans is creating a big threat for craft-based organizations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To fulfill its mission, DEW Crafts must address multiple challenges, including fair trade practices, gender equity, and contributions to the SDGs. Some measures are recommended below to address and overcome these challenges.

Collaborating with Fair Trade organizations to access international fair trade buyers and benefit from their support for skill development, training and mentorship of women artisans. Mentorship and support programs for women help them balance work and family responsibilities.

Conducting gender awareness campaigns and sensitization programs for all employees is crucial to addressing cultural barriers. This entails advocating for women's rights and gender equality at the local level, and engaging with community leaders and stakeholders.

DEW Crafts must continue to consciously align its practices to the achievement of the SDGs. This can be achieved by collaborating with experts or organizations that specialize in SDGs alignment and in producing reports to ensure a clear depiction of the company's SDG contributions. Regular impact assessments need to be done to enable the company to re-strategise when necessary, in order to stay aligned with the SDGs. It is also important for the company to engage in public awareness campaigns in order to educate customers about the company's SDGs contributions, and to promote responsible production and consumption.

CONCLUSION

DEW Crafts, as a social enterprise, has demonstrated a clear commitment to promoting social and economic development in Bangladesh. Through its partnership with DEW, it has contributed

significantly to preserving traditional crafts and empowering marginalized communities. With the right strategies and the continued support of international Fair Trade organizations, DEW Crafts is well-positioned to make a more profound impact in the years to come.

Chapter 13

Embracing Social Solidarity Economy in Quezon City, Metro Manila, Philippines

Rogelio Langomez Reyes

INTRODUCTION

Named after the second President of the Philippines, Manuel L. Quezon, Quezon City is the largest city in Metro Manila, and the most populous and richest city in the Philippines. For over a quarter of a century, from 1949 to 1976, it was the capital of the country. Today, there are 142 barangays or communities spread across the city's six districts. The city's current Mayor Josefina "Joy" Belmonte is the 2023 Champion of the Earth for Policy Leadership, one of the United Nations' highest environmental honors.

However, this highly urbanized city is also home to thousands of poor families whose economic conditions worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many lost their sources of income, such as Juvy who used to be a barangay street sweeper and freelance massage therapist. Quezon City's social solidarity economy story begins here at the start of the pandemic with the Quezon City Public Employment Service Office (QC PESO) taking the lead.

Public Employment Service Offices were established as local government offices in 1999 through Republic Act No. 8759. Due to the growth in functions of the QC PESO, the City enacted Ordinance number SP-2657 series of 2017 – Rationalizing the Quezon City Public Employment Service Office (QC PESO), Providing for its Revised/New Organizational Structure and Staffing Pattern, Duties, Functions and Responsibilities, Appropriating Funds Therefor and for Other Purposes.

QC PESO's activities prior to 2019 were primarily on standard services such as job referrals, the conduct of job fairs and implementation of

the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) programs. But because of the impact of the pandemic on the city residents, especially the already vulnerable and marginalized, we had to think outside of the box. Although we did not know it at that time, we were already laying the groundwork for a social solidarity economy in Quezon City.

CORE FEATURES OF SOCIAL SOLIDARITY ECONOMY

The current QC PESO promotes participatory governance and fosters a collaborative and inclusive approach to decision making. It initiates and proactively uses strategies that enable workers to have a voice and represent themselves in the crafting and implementation of programs and projects that directly affect their lives.

However, prior to the onset of COVID-19, jobseekers, government internship beneficiaries, employers and other clients availed of services as walk-in clients or through referrals. Apart from a dozen OFW Family Circles (OFCs) registered with the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA), there were no workers' organizations under QC PESO's purview.

During the pandemic, the QC Government created the Task Force on Food Security which focused on making food available, accessible, nutritious and consistent. As part of the taskforce, PESO assisted in the conduct of orientations on food security and urban farming, and in the distribution of seeds and farm implements.

Going beyond the distribution of seeds and farm implements, the QC PESO helped the urban farming orientation participants form into farm groups based on their geographical location. This was intended to make the identification of needs easier and facilitate the delivery of services. It also helped these newly-formed community-based organizations identify the training that they wanted to be part of and linked them with the appropriate agencies.

Most of these community-based groups were unaware of the imperative to be included in the roster of government-accredited organizations. The significance of registration documents for

continued access to government services and external funding support were unknown to them. In addition, there were people's organizations that, despite existing for years, lacked registration with any accrediting agency.

To address this, in the fourth quarter of 2021, QC PESO started presenting to these organizations the prospect of becoming a workers' association officially registered with and recognized by the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE). Organizations prepared to proceed were assisted in formulating their constitution and by-laws, and QC PESO facilitated their registration with the DOLE.

To date, there are more than 800 organizations being assisted by the Office, the Urban Farm organizations are now represented in the City's People's Council and there are 473 Workers' Associations duly registered with the DOLE.

Samahan ng mga Kargador (SAMAKA) and Samahan ng mga Kargador at Pamilya (SAMAKAPA)

The Balintawak market area is known as the main drop-off point for vegetables and fruits from the northern regions of the country including the province of Benguet and the Ilocos Regions. Business starts in the early morning hours and ends late at night. Porters or *mga kargador* are some of the indispensable workers in sight since they haul produce from one point to another.

When COVID-19 struck, all entry points to the National Capital Region (NCR) were closed off as a precautionary measure. At some points, even food deliveries were disallowed from entering the vicinity. Thus, the usual busy Balintawak market was transformed into a wide space that hardly had any business. The porters had nothing to do but wait. In 2021, the QC PESO led a dialogue with the porters. The porters aired their grievances including their need for food, education for their children, job security, and additional income since they earn as low as two hundred pesos (Php200) per day. It was also learned that they had leaders in-charge of schedules, work processes and conflict management.

The porters were encouraged to formalize their group and register with the DOLE. Two hundred fifty-four (254) members took part in the registration of *Samahan ng mga Kargador (SAMAKA)*. However, services were not easily accessed due to the porters' work hours. Thus, another organization was built composed of 50 women family members – the *Samahan ng mga Kargador at Pamilya (SAMAKAPA)*. It was through SAMAKAPA that training and other services were provided. Social protection through the Philippine Health Insurance (PhilHealth) was also given to those eligible.

Villa Berde Food Forest Farm

Villa Berde was formed in March 2020 during a nationwide lockdown. The members of the organization were determined enough to provide for their families. Thus, with the assistance of the local government, they borrowed a neglected piece of land and transformed it into their farm. They engaged in food production by cultivating a variety of vegetables and crops, delved into the production and selling of peanut butter, engaged in education and capacity building activities, and participated in bazaars. They also shared their produce through their community feeding program.

Because of their efforts, Villa Berde now serves as a venue for local and national study tours. They are also proud recipients of the 2023 Galing Pook Citizenship Awards – a nationwide search for civil society organizations, non-government organizations, social entrepreneurs and private entities that contribute to building safe, sustainable and smart communities.

FEMINIST QUALITIES

A guiding principle being espoused by the QC PESO is “handholding”, a nurturing quality that specifies that clients are assisted from their initial engagement up to the time that they are capable of doing things on their own. It begins with registration, followed by training if necessary, referral to appropriate offices/sectors/agencies, technical assistance, and coordination and facilitation of programs and services. They are provided with venues to discuss issues and exchange

learning with each other. They are also endorsed for PhilHealth benefits.

Considering that support for clients as individuals is not sufficient, the QC PESO extends its intervention to the families of the clients. Opportunities for education, training and employment are offered to the members of the family when applicable. Those needing health and other services are referred to appropriate offices.

Once the clients are capable enough, these organizations/individuals are encouraged to “pay it forward” and adapt the values of inclusivity and equitable opportunities for all. They are asked to provide assistance to other members of the community. They may “adopt” a child with disability, a child of a migrant worker or a victim of child labor, and provide vegetables and other crops/products. They may also choose to become trainers and share their knowledge and skills with other organizations.

Juvy and Roosevelt

Juvy lost her source of income as a barangay street sweeper and freelance massage therapist during the pandemic. Being the breadwinner taking care of her blind mother, siblings and a child, the situation felt daunting. She was invited to be one of the first to be trained on food security and urban farming. She decided to take on other related training courses. She also took a course in Organic Agriculture Production under the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA). Her income and opportunities grew. Roosevelt, on the other hand, used to raise pigs. After the African Swine Fever hit the country in 2019, an ordinance was passed prohibiting hog raising in the City. This was further aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic. As an alternative, she was offered a chance to learn about catfish farming. She attended seminars provided by the City and its partners. She received fingerlings, decided to turn her pigpens into fish pens, and sold catfish to her neighbors. With the guidance of an assigned mentor, she learned to seek out additional information on how to breed catfish. Currently, she supplies the needs of her community.

Both Juvy and Roosevelt now serve as trainers teaching others on how to have their own livelihood projects. Both are taking up entrepreneurship at the Polytechnic University of the Philippines and Quezon City University, respectively.

DOMINANT FINANCING APPROACH

Initially, the members of each organization are provided with starter kits from the Joy of Urban Farming – a unit of the Office of the City Mayor. After which, they are taught how to generate resources by tapping local government offices such as the Social Services and Development Department (SSDD) and Small Business and Cooperatives Development and Promotions Office (SBCDPO), national government agencies (NGA) such as the Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Plant and Industry and Bureau of Fish and Aquatic Resources, and civil society organizations within their communities.

As they learn to increase and improve on their produce/products, they are provided orientations on community savings. They are encouraged to set aside a portion of their respective incomes and are taught how to manage and build on this as a source of passive income and/or additional capital. They also reserve an amount for social and burial funds. From July 2021 to date, there are twelve (12) active community savings groups.

Entities aspiring to register as cooperatives receive guidance and support in the process. This assistance is facilitated in collaboration with the SBCDPO and other partners specializing in cooperative development. The provision of information and aid ensures that organizations navigating the cooperatives registration procedure are well-informed and equipped with the necessary resources for a smooth and successful registration process.

New Greenland Farm Community

The New Greenland Farm (NGLF) is located in a low-lying area in Bagong Silangan and is flanked by a river and a creek. Overflows resulting from heavy rains go directly to the farmland, making it

difficult for the farmers to plant throughout the year. At times, their crops are destroyed by typhoons.

Recognizing the substantial impact of weather conditions on farmers' incomes, training sessions were done to equip them with skills in food preservation and product development. Through these initiatives, the farmers engaged in activities such as pickling, vegetable chips making and producing lemongrass tea. They also developed their own menu, enabling them to provide snacks and lunch packages for up to 100 visitors. Beyond this, the farmers have ventured into the reselling of rice, showcasing their diversified and sustainable approach to enhancing economic stability in the face of agricultural uncertainties.

As part of their proactive measures, they were the first to buy-in into the concept of a Community Savings and Credit Association (COMSCA). In a recent storm last July 2023 that rendered their crops unusable, their COMSCA played a crucial role. The social fund in their COMSCA was promptly distributed among members, ensuring a means to put food on the table as they worked on their other livelihood projects.

They also took the initiative to establish the New Greenland Farmers Agriculture Cooperative on May 5, 2021. This cooperative serves as a valuable platform for members to market and distribute their produce to a broader market, thereby augmenting their income and overall livelihood. It also proved instrumental in securing a grant from the Department of Science and Technology to enhance their lemongrass tea.

The New Greenland Farm has now earned recognition as a model farm with the stories of resilience of the farmers being shared with the local and international community through study visits and conferences.

Manage Your Own Bank for KPAO

During the first SSE Forum last April 21, Dr. Benjamin Quiñones of the Asian Solidarity Economy Council (ASEC) introduced the concept of "Manage Your Own Bank" (MYOB). This system encourages the

members of the family to contribute to a fund (their own bank), and each member may borrow from the fund with interest. This way, the standard interest rates paid to financial institutions or loan sharks are redirected to the family's bank. This alternative system shall be taught to organizations starting with the Kabahagi Parent Advocates' Organization (KPAO).

The KPAO is duly registered with DOLE and the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and its members are parents of children with disabilities. In 2021, ten members participated in a training course on dress making, and the organization received sewing machines to support their livelihood initiative. This year, 20 members were given a 10-day training course on urban agriculture. KPAO was also linked with HomeNet Philippines and Bayan Innovation Group for resource generation and additional training. To enhance their livelihood pursuits, KPAO shall be trained and guided on MYOB. The implementation of MYOB shall be closely monitored, and insights gained from their experiences shall be shared with other organizations, showcasing KPAO's commitment to knowledge-sharing within the community.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO DECENT WORK AND THE SDGs

The QC PESO has a bias for the most disadvantaged members of the community. Its focus is on inclusivity and intends to create more employment opportunities for women, persons with disabilities, the out-of-school youth, persons with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sexual characteristics (SOGIESC), and persons deprived of liberty. Particular slots in training and employment programs are reserved for them.

The Emergency Employment Program

In 2020, the Office started the Emergency Employment Program (EEP). This was for those seeking temporary employment and/or whose assistance are needed due to calamities or existing economic conditions. It provided opportunities for persons deprived of liberty, out-of-school youth, parents of children with disabilities, youth who were victims of child labor, and migrant workers.

On August 15 2023, the City, through the Persons with Disability Affairs Office, launched the Kasama Ka sa QC. The program provides employment opportunities with the City for 300 persons with disabilities for four (4) months. It gives them the chance to gain work experience and harness their skills. At the end of their contract, they may be renewed as EE or job order staff (and hopefully be one of the permanent staff of the City Government), referred to companies for employment or provided with livelihood skills or any appropriate training.

ADVOCACY FOR SSE

On April 21, 2023, three days after the UN resolution adopting SSE, the QC LGU, through the QC PESO and in partnership with social entrepreneurs, conducted the First SSE Forum. Social entrepreneurs, non-government organizations and government agencies were oriented on green jobs production, the SSE, and the advantages of supporting social entrepreneurs. QC also opened its doors as a social laboratory for those who may wish to implement programs/projects with the community-based organizations in QC.

A month-long series of activities on SSE was also conducted in November 2023 starting with the Workers' Conference on SSE on 9 and 10 November 2023. Attendees comprised diverse groups including farmers, overseas Filipino workers, the religious sector, vendors, women's groups, members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) communities, senior citizens, cooperatives and other workers in the informal economy. During the conference, participants were educated about the importance of formal recognition based on their actual work, and the possibility of organizing into guilds was discussed. They were also asked to contribute to the registration process of the informal economy workers within their respective communities. This initiative aims to identify a minimum of 100 workers' guilds and the registration of an additional 200 organizations with the DOLE in 2024.

From November 19 to 24, Quezon City, through the QC PESO, co-hosted the HomeNet Southeast Asia's Subregional Workshop on

Social Solidarity Economy (SSE) back-to-back with their executive meeting and trade fair. This was attended by representatives from six (6) country HomeNet organizations including Cambodia, Indonesia, Philippines, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam.

It also partnered with the Kabahagi Center for Children with Disabilities and the Bayan Innovation Group for the Tatak SE: Kabahagi Ka sa QC – an initiative to develop social entrepreneurs starting with home-based workers, particularly the parents of children with disabilities.

On November 29, 2023, the QC PESO, Freedom from Debt Coalition and the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice started the LGU-People Partnership Series. With the theme Localizing Sustainable Growth: Creating Green Jobs and Building a Caring and Entrepreneurial City, the conference focused on collaborative efforts on urban agriculture and circular economy by people's/community-based organizations and the local government units.

CREATING AVENUES FOR GROWTH

In 2022, the Quezon City University (QCU) and QC PESO started the out-of-school youth program, aiming to assist this demographic by providing training and empowering them towards self-sufficiency. Beneficiaries underwent comprehensive training sessions in urban agriculture, product development, mushroom cultivation, and soap making. Additionally, a QC PESO staff member conducted sessions on photo and video presentation, equipping them with skills to produce high-quality multimedia materials. The initiative allocated a dedicated workspace for them at QCU. Presently, they have organized into an association, forming groups of five (5) to seven (7) members, each specializing in a unique product. These groups actively participate in bazaars, showcasing and selling their products.

The QC PESO also collaborates with church-based organizations, particularly through their labor, migrants and youth ministries. In addition to providing orientations on PESO programs and services,

discussions on labor rights and governance are conducted with parishioners.

Furthermore, the QC PESO actively engages with the private sector, encouraging them to employ individuals with disabilities and out-of-school youth. A memorandum of understanding was signed between the City and Cabalen Group, a leading Filipino buffet and casual dining restaurant, to facilitate the employment of persons with hearing impairment. Efforts are underway to secure another partnership with a different company.

In addition, the QC PESO initiated discussions on how to better support women deprived of liberty and members of the LGBTIQ communities through green jobs creation and the development of community-based enterprises.

This year, the QC PESO was also directed to serve as the secretariat to the QC Informal Economy Development Council -- the council with the primary responsibility for the promotion, growth and development of the informal economy.

CONCLUSION

In the strategy map for 2023-2027, we at the QC PESO redefined our mission to be “the primary department that provides a full employment cycle and lifelong learning which ensures social protection for the QCitizens”. From merely being a provider of regular employment facilitation, internship and career guidance, we have evolved into a department that starts with individual and/or community preparation to empowerment. We handhold our clients from initial training to self-directed learning, from employment to jobs creation, and from individual needs to collective resilience.

Included in QC PESO’s strategies is awareness raising on SSE. We primarily promote an environment where SSE entities thrive and are given adequate support. We conduct training and collaborate with different organizations for green jobs creation, for additional

education and employment opportunities for the marginalized, and towards a people's economy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To enhance the contributions of QC PESO, there is a crucial need for capacity development. The expansion of programs, services and associated tasks demand a shift in perspective, prompting adjustments in existing processes and systems. New members should undergo orientations focusing on decent work while others may receive training in community development and SSE principles. Additionally, QC PESO can design a self-assessment survey for city departments/offices to evaluate the contributions (or lack thereof) in fostering an enabling environment for SSE in QC.

In order to optimize the benefits derived from both internal and external funding, it is imperative to formulate a social solidarity economy (SSE) roadmap – a visual framework delineating strategies for empowering organizations towards heightened self-sufficiency. This roadmap should be backed by legislation and encompass a well-coordinated supply chain, facilitating the seamless and timely exchange of goods and services among city-based entities and those beyond city limits.

Additionally, the establishment of virtual and physical trading posts is crucial in facilitating the exchange of goods among diverse organizations, further fortifying the collaborative network within the SSE framework.

Chapter 14

Yakans Weaving Peace and Solidarity: A Case Study of Badja Weavers Association, Basilan Province, Bangsamoro Autonomous Region, Philippines

Camille G. Quiambao

This paper presents an assessment of the Badja Weavers Association (BWA), an indigenous community-based association registered formally under the Barangay Micro Business Enterprise (BMBE) of the Local Government Unit in the Philippines. This evaluation encompasses how the core features of SSE and the feminist qualities are practised in BWA as well as the financing approach of the organisation. The paper then discusses the strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities, as well as recommendations for BWA in its SSE journey.

CORE FEATURES OF SSE THAT ARE CONSPICUOUSLY PRESENT/STRONGLY PRACTISED

BWA strongly practises the following core features of SSE:

Engaged in Economic Activities

The association that operates under the arts, culture and heritage sector is selling products, the Yakan *tennun* weaves. It generates income and 100% of the total revenue at present is from the sales. The weavers are currently making profit and they expect it to increase once they upscale their products and connect to a wider market.

Primacy of People over Profit

BWA has a joint emphasis on profit and social mission. Its main objective is to create employment opportunities for jobless community members, especially women. Since 75 to 100% of the profit goes back to the weavers, a big portion of Badja's surpluses go directly to its social mission. Moreover, its other goal is to pass down the art of *tennun* weaving to the next generation, which means that

the interests of the Yakan Indigenous People is at the core of BWA's mission.

Contribution to Decent Work and the SDGs

BWA helps provide a secure source of income for the vulnerable and marginalized people in Basilan (women, youth, PWDs, older persons, informal workers) thereby reducing poverty.

The association supports reclaiming peace in Basilan. Being in a conflict area, the Yakan people are at high risk of abuse, exploitation, violence and recruitment by armed groups. However, because weaving puts food on the table, it helps lessen the chances of the people joining the extremist group.

BWA supports women and girls as most members are women who strive to complete their elementary and high school education through the Department of Education of the Philippines' Alternative Learning System (ALS). It meets their practical gender needs because selling *tennun* weaves enables them to complete their education and break the cycle of poverty, allowing them to send their children to school and create a brighter future for their families and community. Weaving also lessens the chances of early marriage because it keeps girls in school and prepares them for a secure livelihood. This helps empower them to decide for themselves and reject bride price and dowry, which are still being practised in some areas in Basilan.

Voluntary Cooperation

Everyone is welcome to join and remain in BWA freely and voluntarily. Moreover, when there are orders of weaves, each member has the liberty to decide whether to join or not in the production. Since the members have other responsibilities outside the organization, it is fine if there are some who cannot commit to doing the weaves at a duration requested by a client. Only those who are willing and available need to work on the weaves.

While somewhat practised, the following core features of SSE are not strongly present in Badja:

Mutual Aid

Solidarity (locally known as *bayanihan*) is apparent in the practice of loaning threads and yarns to members who need financial assistance so they can weave and sell them later. However, these materials mostly come from personal stocks of individual members instead of a communal source of weaving materials that the members could use in times of need.

BWA as an association, has yet to establish a mutual aid fund for its members, from which it can give financial assistance to the weavers in emergency situations and provide health insurance services.

To strengthen mutual aid, I would recommend that the members pool a small amount from their earnings so that they could establish an emergency fund. Once they have this, it would be quicker to provide support to a member facing an emergency. My other recommendation is, on instances that they sell the weaves directly to clients and without the intervention of middlemen, they should allot the surplus to their group savings. This savings should not be divided among members later but instead be used as a calamity fund.

Democratic and/or Participatory Governance

BWA's main stakeholders are the numerous weavers doing the woven fabric called *tennun* simultaneously, either in their own households or in the weaving centers. The weavers' family members are supportive and understand the principles and values of the association. Despite this, there is still plenty of room for increased involvement among the members of BWA.

BWA registered formally as an association under the Barangay Micro Business Enterprise (BMBE) of the Local Government Unit. The board members and officials registered were appointed instead of elected. They are the ones who are most active in the organization, which is why they were the default officers. Though it may be common for a

new organization like BWA to not have an election at the beginning, I strongly suggest that they do that eventually, so that each member gets the chance to select who they would like to lead their association and be accountable to the members.

Rules and regulations must also be established because they have not done this to date. Further, there is no regular schedule of meetings yet, so my recommendation is for them to meet at least once every month with a clear agenda.

Autonomy and Independence

Since BWA is a community-based organization, it is technically a non-partisan and non-political organization. However, the village captain and the mayor might have influence over the members since they are donating threads and looms to the association.

Since BWA is a new organization, it is not easy to determine their level of autonomy and independence from the politicians in their community. Hence, my recommendation is to strengthen the financing schemes of the association so that they could carry on with their endeavors in the years to come without depending much on the local government.

FEMINIST VALUES THAT ARE VALIDATED/PRACTISED, AND NOT VALIDATED/NOT PRACTISED

All the feminist values are being practised by the BWA members.

Altruism, Care, and Concern for Others

BWA started because the Alternative Learning System (ALS) educator, Teacher Arian, wanted to help her students finish their studies. The reason most of them could not attend classes is because they had to either work in the field or take care of their children. Because weaving can generate income without leaving the home, the ALS teacher talked to the barangay captain to help her acquire threads and yarns for her students. Teacher Arian went above and beyond her duty as teacher because she had genuine concern for her students.

Cooperation

Everyone in the village cooperates to help develop BWA. The weavers, their family members and the local government officials are supportive because they know that the enterprise benefits the household, the Badja community and the entire Yakan group. For example, there is a weaving set up in one compound where groups of families reside. The locals participated in creating smaller wooden implements, especially designed for children so that the young ones can practise the craft. The local government donated the materials for the weaving implementation while the parents gave their time and free labor to build the weaving set up.

Nurturing

One of the benefits of passing down the art of *tennun* weaving is the bonding between the parent (or any adult caregiver) and a child. This helps strengthen the family, supports the child's development, and serves as a leisure activity in the household.

I've also observed all the other SSE feminist values - empathy, altruism, reciprocity/mutuality, generosity, unity/harmony in BWA, to some extent. But if I were to choose one that is least validated, it would be reciprocity/mutuality. This value is somewhat present within Badja village because I saw that the community members are exchanging their things such as threads and yarns and returning the favor to one another. However, this practice could be lacking once the weavers deal with middlemen outside their community. There is a risk for some middlemen to buy the weaves from the BWA members at a low price and then sell them at a very high price to clients from the cities. Unfortunately, the middlemen are not obliged to share their gains to the artists who made those high value *tennun* weaves. When times are bad, like in crisis situations, the weavers suffer because they have no choice but to sell them at a low price to the middlemen. When times are good, like when the items are sold at a good price to clients, the tendency is only the middlemen would benefit. There is no mutual sharing of sacrifices and benefits.

DOMINANT FINANCING APPROACH ADOPTED BY THE ORGANIZATION IN FUNDING ITS BUSINESS ACTIVITIES

The financing of BWA is in greater part credit-first/external finance approach. They started with threads and yarns that were donated by the local government. The weaving center that was built in the village in 2021 came from the government as well.

The advantages of credit-first/external finance approach are the following:

- BWA was able to begin its operations right away. Because a generous number of threads and yarns were donated at the beginning, more weavers were able to join, and they were able to produce a high volume of *tennun* weaves in a variety of designs.
- The members received higher profit initially because they did not spend on threads and yarns. Instead of purchasing expensive materials in Zamboanga, the weavers did not have to buy anymore. The only capital they needed at the start was their labor in weaving.

The disadvantages of credit-first/external finance approach are the following:

- There is a tendency that the members would value the resources less because they were given to them for free. On the contrary, self-financing approach would give a greater sense of ownership among the members because each of them contributed and worked hard for it.
- The association has no pool of savings yet up to this time. Some members could be saving money individually, but they do not have a collective that is from the contribution of the members. This could have been addressed by the saving-first approach because if the weavers pool their money, no matter how small, it could be used to grow their enterprise.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS BEING ADDRESSED BY THE ORGANIZATION

SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), 10 (Reduced Inequalities) and 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) are being addressed by BWA.

SDG 8 is evident as BWA contributes to employment creation and income opportunities in Badja village.

The members can express their creativity and humanity and help one another while earning. This provides them with a sense of worth, satisfaction and fulfillment.

Due to past conflicts between the Abu Sayyaf violent extremist group and the military, there have been severe setbacks in the people's livelihoods. However, because of weaving, there is a creation of employment opportunities for women, persons with disabilities, youth, and other marginalized members of the community. There is no discrimination because anyone is free to engage in weaving if they know how or are willing to learn.

Weaving provides opportunities for the people to earn more from their weaves because it reduces their dependence on abusive middlemen. The weavers are starting to be entrepreneurs who are earning better margins on top of their direct labor. Aside from that, they are acknowledged as artisans. This uplifts their morale, helps boost their self-esteem and value their skills even more.

Opportunities for the economically disadvantaged provided by BWA support social development and social inclusion. BWA supports small, marginalized weavers, seeking to move them towards secure income, self-sufficiency, and ownership.

Once BWA has been introduced to a wider market and new clients, the occurrence of unjust pricing and unequal distribution of wealth could be eliminated. They would earn more profit, and that excess income could be allocated to their savings fund.

The association also plans to upscale its products by partnering with other groups. This is an opportunity to create even more employment not just in their village but also to other communities. For example, they would like to incorporate the woven *banig* of the Badjao indigenous people in Basilan to make bags and home decorations. Furthermore, Badja's SSE model could be shared to other Yakan weaving communities in Basilan so that others would learn from their best practices.

Although BWA promotes decent work, the 'social protection and social security' aspect of this has yet to be addressed. At present, they don't have much security against threats and vulnerability. This is very crucial especially in the case of the Yakan people as they are in a conflict area that is at high risk of abuse, exploitation, and violence. Furthermore, the majority of the members are women who have special health needs, but they have no maternity benefits. There are senior citizen weavers also who are more prone to ailments, however, health insurance is not provided. These informal workers are not protected in case their ability to work is disrupted.

For SDG 10, BWA helps reduce inequalities based on age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status.

BWA does not discriminate in accepting members, be it based on racial, ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, disability, age, political differences, and other forms of intersectionality. Moreover, edifying ethical values is present in the organization. It is the people and social purpose that are the main emphasis of BWA. As it aims to create employment for the marginalized groups who have been suffering from oppression and inequality, it raises awareness of the need for greater justice in trade.

BWA helps preserve the culture and heritage of the Yakan Indigenous People, which is why it addresses SDG 11.

Capacity building of the members is BWA's focus. Foremost, it capacitates the youth so that their heritage won't be lost while preparing them for a source of livelihood in the future. It is also beneficial for the indigenous children's wellbeing because when they

know their cultural roots, it strengthens their self-identity, self-competence, and a sense of place and security. At the same time, the children could earn incidentally from their products. They weave on their own will and they earn the same level of income on output basis. The adult members of the community are also capacitated because they can improve their craft and have a more stable source of income. Examples of this are the aspiration of eliminating middlemen through directing the clients to the weavers, and the partnership with the local government unit for TESDA (Technical Education and Skills Development Authority) dressmaking scholarships so that the members could also make clothes out of their *tennun* weaves.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

BWA was built on the values of cooperation, solidarity, and reciprocity. It operates in accordance with most of the SSE principles. Based on my analysis of the organization, my conclusions, and recommendations to strengthen it as an SSE entity are below.

There are strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in the organization's SSE journey.

Strengths

The values of BWA are deeply rooted in their identity as Yakan indigenous people. Because they have a strong sense of pride in their culture and heritage, the tradition of *tennun* weaving will most likely be sustained despite the adversities in the community.

The full support of the local government unit has immense value to BWA. Given that Badja is in a conflict area, safety and security have always been a main concern. But the presence of local officials who are in partnership with the military makes it easy for potential and current partners to work with their organization. Moreover, it helps speed up the process of implementing activities related to upscaling the skills of the members and aiding their families.

The members of BWA are very talented weavers. However, they are also open to learning to sew and design as there is a growing demand

for ready-to-wear clothing with weaves. Their attitude of openness to change and evolve is a strength because it will help sustain their business in the changing world.

Weaknesses

The members do not meet on a regular basis. They communicate only to Teacher Arian, their leader, individually as the need arises. Their officers were also appointed instead of elected. If this persists, there could be an issue with the alignment of the members and might possibly cause conflict.

Credit-first approach is the dominant financing in BWA. This could be a hindrance for the members to become self-reliant and independent from their donors.

Opportunities

The growing interest in sustainable, locally sourced, and indigenous textiles in the fashion scene is a great opportunity for BWA to market their weaves. Further, the proposal to the Department of Education to use indigenous loose garment called *sablay* instead of the traditional academic regalia robe for graduation ceremonies is a chance to offer the Yakan *tennun* to schools as a material for the *sablay*.

Promoting the weaves is an opportunity to tell stories about the Yakan people's resilience, creativity, and courage. This would help end the stereotypical notion of Basilan as a place of violence and war. Weaving is a channel of promoting peace in the province and this SSE entity based in that area provides room to educate people about it.

Threats

Armed conflict and clan wars in Basilan is a threat to the people's livelihood, education, and overall wellbeing.

Recommendations to strengthen BWA as an SSE entity are summarized below:

Conducting regular meetings, electing officers, and establishing rules and regulations must be done for BWA to be more participatory and democratic.

Continuing to market to a wider network, product development and upscaling the skills of the weavers are imperative to improve the income of the organization.

BWA should start focusing a little more on a self-financing approach to give the members a greater sense of ownership of their entity. This could also help them start a collective fund for mutual aid to establish an emergency fund.

Eventually, once the organization has grown, it is recommended for BWA to provide social protection and social security such as insurance for its members, especially since they are in a vulnerable area that is prone to abuse, exploitation and violence.

Plan of action on how the self-assessment survey can be extended to other organizations in the Philippines

Primarily, organizations need to understand and see the importance of the survey in terms of developing their entity. One way to make this happen is to provide testimonials from members of organizations who have answered the survey and received the recommendations based on the result. They could share how they've implemented the suggestion and how it has helped their organization improve.

There are many enterprises in the Philippines that are managed by people who did not finish formal schooling. It would be a challenge for them to answer the survey because it is written in English. Hence, I suggest having it translated to local languages with simple wording. It might be helpful to have a digital version of the survey so that there would be an option to answer this online for those who have access to the internet.

For item 2.4 on the feminist qualities in the organization, using a scale for the answer instead of present or not present may be explored. There might be cases wherein a feminist value is present to a certain extent even if it is not fully practised.

Chapter 15

Creating Inclusive and Sustainable Communities: The Work of PSPK, Selayang, Selangor, Malaysia

Keerthana Rajaderan

ABSTRACT

This abstract provides an overview of the grassroots work carried out by PSPK, an organization established in 2006, committed to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by creating inclusive, cohesive, and sustainable communities. PSPK's initiatives focus on the well-being of urban poor communities, with particular emphasis on empowering women and transforming the communities. PSPK's work is guided by a bottom-up approach, enabling a comprehensive understanding of communities from their perspective. This approach ensures that actions are taken based on a thorough comprehension of community needs and aspirations. To facilitate open expression, PSPK establishes safe spaces within the community, where individuals can freely share their feelings, thoughts, interests, and needs. PSPK places special emphasis on amplifying women's voices through monthly gatherings conducted in their mother tongue, allowing for optimal self-expression. While striving to create inclusive communities, PSPK also faces several challenges. These include a lack of community awareness, inadequate identification of marginalized groups' specific needs, and the prevalence of discrimination and prejudice. PSPK takes these challenges seriously and approaches them with a deep commitment to humanitarian values, ensuring a balance between equality and equity in its engagement with the communities. To maximize impact and drive transformative change, PSPK forges partnerships and leverages resources and expertise through collaboration with multiple stakeholders. By uniting efforts,

PSPK enhances its capacity to address community challenges and work towards sustainable development. A unique aspect of PSPK's approach is its creation of a platform located within the community's neighborhood, that actively involves marginalized groups in community initiatives. PSPK aims to bridge divides and foster a sense of belonging by embracing cultural diversity with an empathetic mindset. Through grassroots work, community engagement, and strategic partnerships, PSPK takes significant strides towards accelerating progress and achieving the aspirations of the SDGs where no one is left behind.

INTRODUCTION

The Association for Social Services and Community Development, better known as Perkhidmatan Sosial dan Pembangunan Komuniti (PSPK), officially registered as a non-governmental organization in 2006. Since then, PSPK has been actively engaged in grassroots work. Nestled within the vibrant urban landscape surrounding Malaysia's bustling capital, Kuala Lumpur, is the remarkable community of Selayang, Gombak. Here, a rich tapestry of socio-economic disparities, relationship dynamics, and familial structures weaves together people from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds. This harmonious coexistence offers a unique perspective on community inclusivity.

Selayang's uniqueness goes beyond its socio-economic diversity; it is equally defined by the peaceful coexistence of people from different races, faiths, and nationalities under shared roofs. Cultural crossroads exist in many homes where Malay, Indian, Chinese, Punjabi, and refugee communities share spaces, either renting rooms or residing in shared buildings. This cohabitation, emblematic of Selayang's cultural richness, underscores the importance of bridging language and cultural divides for true community inclusivity.

Yet, as the world evolves and faces new challenges, Selayang confronts its own developmental issues. The COVID-19 pandemic had widespread implications, further complicating the intricate socio-economic landscape. The Selayang Wholesale Market, a major employer of refugees, stopped hiring foreign workers, prioritizing Malaysian citizens. This abrupt shift not only impacted refugees but also placed local citizens in unfamiliar territory, as they struggled to compensate for the absence of foreign laborers.

Amidst this complex web of socio-economic challenges, there exists a pressing need to build truly inclusive communities, not only in Selayang but as a global pursuit. Inclusivity here means more than the fair allocation of resources; it calls for understanding, acceptance, and appreciation of the diverse languages, traditions, and perspectives coexisting within these shared spaces. It is not just a moral aspiration but a practical strategy to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a global agenda set by the United Nations to foster a better, more sustainable future for everyone.

PSPK'S UNIQUENESS AND SIGNIFICANCE

PSPK is unique in its own way. The significance of locating initiatives within the community's own neighborhood cannot be overstated. PSPK recognizes that to truly understand, empathize with, and uplift marginalized groups, one must be a part of their everyday lives. By establishing a physical presence in the heart of the community, PSPK has been able to seamlessly integrate its programs into the daily fabric of the lives it seeks to enhance. This local infrastructure, with 15 various centers under one roof, serves as the central hub for successful, sustainable initiatives that address the unique needs of destitute women, single mothers, children, and youth.

PSPK's approach goes beyond providing services; fostering a profound sense of belonging. For PSPK, inclusivity is a way of life. The organization understands that true progress can only be achieved by bridging differences and embracing the cultural diversity within these communities. PSPK's empathetic mindset ensures that every voice is heard, every culture is celebrated, and every individual feels valued. This commitment to unity amid diversity creates a fertile ground for the seeds of sustainable change to flourish.

PSPK AND ITS COMMUNITY INCLUSIVITY

At the heart of PSPK's approach lies a profound commitment to fostering robust relationships within the community. This foundational step enables the organization to truly understand the unique needs and aspirations of those it serves. Rather than imposing solutions from above, PSPK believes in empowering the community to take ownership of its development journey. By actively engaging with the community, PSPK builds trust, identifies specific needs, and tailors its initiatives accordingly. This approach not only ensures relevance but also strengthens the community's sense of belonging and involvement in its own transformation.

One of the most distinctive and impactful aspects of PSPK's work is its monthly gatherings. These gatherings are not mere meetings; they are vital spaces where voices are heard, stories are shared, and solutions are forged. What sets PSPK apart is its unwavering commitment to conducting these discussions in the mother tongues of the community members. This approach, deeply rooted in cultural inclusivity, allows for optimal self-expression, and ensures that no voice is left unheard. This inclusivity empowers women to feel more confident in expressing their thoughts, concerns, and aspirations, ultimately leading to more effective and culturally sensitive approaches to community development.

Besides that, PSPK's approach aligns seamlessly with the organization's vision of empowering women and children to live their dreams with dignity and hope. By ensuring that every individual, regardless of creed and race, can participate actively in their own development, PSPK contributes significantly to strengthening families and transforming communities. As we reflect on these innovative strategies, it becomes evident that inclusive communities are not only attainable but also essential in realizing the SDGs and building a more sustainable future for all. PSPK's pioneering work serves as a beacon of hope, illuminating the path towards a more inclusive and equitable society in Malaysia and beyond.

PSPK'S TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACH: PILLARS AND FOCUS AREAS

PSPK is not just an organization; it is a catalyst for change, operating on three crucial pillars that revolve around four vital focus areas. These pillars and focus areas are the cornerstones of PSPK's holistic approach to creating inclusive and sustainable communities, nurturing women's empowerment, ensuring children's education, and restoring the environment.

The first pillar, *services*, serves as the bedrock upon which PSPK's community transformation initiatives are built. PSPK recognizes the importance of converging services and building the capabilities and strengths of individuals within the community. The goal is to empower them to become self-reliant and take control of their lives. PSPK offers a wide array of activities under this pillar, including providing essential items like vegetables and provisions to the community, engaging with local authorities, bridging the gaps between government assistance and community needs, assisting with applications, and offering counseling and casework support.

The second pillar, *skills training and learning*, is a testament to PSPK's commitment to equipping individuals with the tools they need to thrive. PSPK recognizes that knowledge is power, and this pillar focuses on imparting valuable skills and knowledge to community members. Activities here encompass a broad spectrum, ranging from focus group discussions, training sessions, motivational talks, and seminars to addressing mental health, providing family counseling, guiding children, and offering entrepreneurial learning opportunities. The skills training component includes practical skills such as baking, sewing, computer literacy, and digital marketing.

The third pillar, *empower social enterprises*, reflects PSPK's innovative approach to community development. Here, the emphasis is on empowering individuals to not only improve their own lives but also contribute to the betterment of their communities. This pillar encourages the creation of support groups that increase coping capacities and ownership among community members. PSPK's activities in this realm encompass a wide array of initiatives, including the development of entrepreneurial skills, particularly in baking, sewing, and computer learning. These skills not only empower women but also equip them to participate actively in economic activities.

All these pillars are aligned with four critical focus areas that underpin PSPK's work. Firstly, as part of community development, PSPK facilitates the convergence of services and the building of capabilities within the community. The focus is on soft skills and knowledge that enable individuals to become self-reliant. Activities include providing essential supplies, engaging with local authorities, and assisting with government programs and applications.

Secondly, women empowerment is focused on nurturing and

empowering women to realize their fullest potential. Support groups and a range of activities, from training and seminars to mental health programs and skills training, equip women with the tools they need to take ownership of their lives and thrive.

Thirdly, children's education is geared towards providing both formal and informal education opportunities to children. PSPK fosters financial literacy, language classes, team building, and skills training, ensuring that children have access to the resources they need to become responsible adults.

The final focus area is environment restoration. This is our commitment to fostering a sustainable and resilient environment. PSPK engages the community in activities like urban plantation and recycling. Innovative initiatives include turning a rooftop garden into a learning hub, cultivating herbs and easy-to-grow vegetables, and recycling plastic bottles to create useful products, generating income while promoting environmental responsibility.

CHALLENGES FACED BY PSPK

In PSPK's journey, several obstacles have surfaced, including community unawareness, the need for better identification of marginalized groups' specific needs, and the presence of discrimination and prejudice. PSPK's resilient approach in navigating challenges on the path to inclusivity can be witnessed while PSPK tirelessly works towards the creation of inclusive communities. It is essential to recognize the challenges that often accompany such transformative endeavors.

One of the primary hurdles PSPK encounters is the lack of community awareness. In many cases, urban poor communities are unaware of their rights, available resources, and the opportunities that can uplift

their lives. Addressing this knowledge deficit becomes a crucial first step in PSPK's mission. Through awareness campaigns and educational initiatives, PSPK seeks to empower communities with information, ensuring that individuals are well-informed and able to make choices that positively impact their lives.

Besides that, understanding the specific needs of marginalized groups within a diverse community is a complex task. Everyone's circumstances can vary widely, and a one-size-fits-all approach often falls short. PSPK acknowledges the importance of tailoring its programs to address these unique needs effectively. This involves conducting thorough assessments, engaging in open dialogues with community members, and continually adapting its initiatives to align with evolving requirements. Discrimination and prejudice, deeply entrenched in society, present formidable challenges. These biases can hinder the progress of marginalized individuals and communities. PSPK recognizes the urgency of addressing discrimination head-on, advocating for equal treatment and opportunities for all.

SOLUTIONS AND WAYS TO OVERCOME CHALLENGES

To overcome the challenges, PSPK instills a culture of respect among the women and children who come to its center to receive support. PSPK emphasizes the importance of respecting one another, regardless of their status, job, or background. This value is fundamental to PSPK's mission, and it serves as a litmus test for community engagement. By fostering an environment of respect, understanding, and empathy, PSPK aims to break down these barriers and create a more inclusive society.

Moreover, PSPK has adopted an innovative approach by forming working committees and volunteer groups within the community itself. This 'community by community' concept enables individuals to

understand one another better, overcome challenges collectively, and empower each other. These committees and groups serve as a bridge between PSPK and the community, ensuring that initiatives are aligned with the community's unique needs and aspirations. PSPK, true to its commitment to humanitarian values, confronts these challenges head-on, striving to strike a balance between equality and equity in its engagement with communities. This approach also fosters a sense of ownership, making community members active participants in their own development journey.

COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIP

PSPK firmly believes that collaboration and partnership are the keys to unlocking the full potential of community development. In PSPK's relentless pursuit of creating inclusive communities and driving sustainable development, the organization places paramount importance on knowledge transfer and sustainability planning. While funding and grants are undoubtedly vital, PSPK firmly believes that non-governmental organisations (NGOs) should aspire to build programs capable of sustaining themselves. This fundamental principle is what led PSPK to venture into the realm of social entrepreneurship.

Partnerships are a double-edged sword—they can bring tremendous benefits but also pose potential challenges. PSPK is acutely aware of the significance of its partnerships, which reflect the organization's values. That is why PSPK is steadfast in adhering to non-political and non-religious rules, which enable it to collaborate with like-minded and reputable organizations that share its commitment to helping the community.

An example of a successful partnership is found in PSPK's

collaboration with the CIMB Foundation. This partnership not only seeded essential equipment for a bakery production unit but also provided training to single mothers in baking PSPK's signature bread, the "Penang Benggali Bread." Over three years, this collaboration expanded with support from the APPGM-SDG funding assistance, training youth in café management and micro-entrepreneurship. Together, these initiatives empowered the community to launch the "Bites N' Beans Cafe," a social enterprise introduced in 2021. The cafe embodies the concept of women baking the bread, while youth from the community manage and operate the establishment—a testament to PSPK's commitment to sustainable, community-driven initiatives.

PSPK's collaboration is not limited to foundations and corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs; it extends to the realm of academia and government entities. The organization has partnered with esteemed institutions like the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) and UNIKL Foundation, fostering knowledge exchange and guidance. PSPK's association with IIUM under RCE Greater Gombak aligns seamlessly with the goals of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), serving as a catalyst for progress.

PSPK's outreach also extends to government bodies, including the Majlis Perbandaran Selayang, Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat (JKM), and Jabatan Pembangunan Wanita. These partnerships bridge critical resources and expertise, allowing PSPK to better meet the needs of the community and empower individuals towards sustainability.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, through grassroots work, community engagement, and strategic partnerships, PSPK exemplifies the collective spirit required to accelerate progress and achieve the aspirations of the SDGs. By addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by destitute women, single mothers, children, and youth, PSPK paves the way for a brighter,

more inclusive future. PSPK's unique approach, rooted in pillars and focus areas, represents a holistic strategy to address the complex challenges faced by urban communities in Malaysia. Through these initiatives, PSPK not only empowers individuals but also transforms communities, fostering sustainable development and progress toward the SDGs.

For PSPK, sustainability is not just a buzzword; it is a guiding ethos. PSPK understands that relying solely on donations can be precarious. Instead, PSPK focuses on creating initiatives that have the inherent capacity to stand on their own two feet. This forward-thinking approach not only ensures the longevity of PSPK's programs but also sets a precedent for other NGOs.

In the end, PSPK's vision extends far beyond the confines of Selayang, Gombak—it extends to a world where communities unite, where differences are celebrated, and where no one is left behind. Through their resolute commitment, PSPK is a reminder that sustainable development is not a distant dream; it is a shared responsibility that begins right within our neighborhoods, our communities, and our hearts. As PSPK diligently navigates the complexities of community engagement, it contributes invaluable insights that have the power to shape SDGs-centric initiatives. The organization's holistic approach, grounded in community involvement, has a high potential to become a model for creating a society that truly leaves no one behind.

Appendices

Appendix 1

UN Resolution on SSE (A/RES/77/281)

United Nations

A/RES/77/281



General Assembly

Distr.: General
27 April 2023

Seventy-seventh session
Agenda item 18
Sustainable development

Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 18 April 2023

[without reference to a Main Committee (A/77/L.60)]

77/281. Promoting the social and solidarity economy for sustainable development

The General Assembly,

Recalling its resolution 70/1 of 25 September 2015, entitled “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”,

Recalling also its resolution 69/313 of 27 July 2015 on the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development,

Recalling further its resolution 71/256 of 23 December 2016 on the New Urban Agenda, the annex to which contains a commitment to supporting micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises and cooperatives throughout the value chain, in particular businesses and enterprises in the social and solidarity economy, operating in both the formal and informal economies,

Recalling its resolution 76/135 of 16 December 2021, entitled “Cooperatives in social development”, in which it recognized that cooperatives, in their various forms, promoted the fullest possible participation in the economic and social development of Indigenous Peoples, local communities and all people, whose inclusion strengthened social and economic development and contributed to the eradication of poverty and hunger,

Recognizing that social entrepreneurship, including cooperatives and social enterprises, can help to alleviate poverty and catalyse social transformation by strengthening the productive capacities of those in vulnerable situations and producing goods and services accessible to them,

Recognizing also that the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the adverse impacts of climate change and geopolitical tensions and conflicts have exposed many fragilities in economies and deepened existing inequalities, and that a deeper, more ambitious, transformative and integrated response is urgently needed,

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Noting that, to accelerate efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, the Secretary-General, in his report entitled “Our Common Agenda”,¹ encourages a broader range of businesses, from multinational corporations to micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises, to participate in the Sustainable Development Goals and climate action, including through business models that aligned with efforts to rethink measures of progress and prosperity,

Recognizing the resolution of the International Labour Organization concerning decent work and the social and solidarity economy, adopted in June 2022, in which it recognizes that the social and solidarity economy encompasses enterprises, organizations and other entities that are engaged in economic, social and environmental activities to serve the collective and/or general interest, which are based on the principles of voluntary cooperation and mutual aid, democratic and/or participatory governance, autonomy and independence and the primacy of people and social purpose over capital in the distribution and use of surpluses and/or profits, as well as assets, that social and solidarity economy entities aspire to long-term viability and sustainability and to the transition from the informal to the formal economy and operate in all sectors of the economy, that they put into practice a set of values which are intrinsic to their functioning and consistent with care for people and planet, equality and fairness, interdependence, self-governance, transparency and accountability and the attainment of decent work and livelihoods and that, according to national circumstances, the social and solidarity economy includes cooperatives, associations, mutual societies, foundations, social enterprises, self-help groups and other entities operating in accordance with the values and principles of the social and solidarity economy,

Acknowledging that the social and solidarity economy can contribute to the achievement and localization of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly in terms of employment and decent work, the provision of social services, such as those related to health and care, education and skills training, environmental protection, including through the promotion of sustainable economic practices, the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women, access to affordable finance and local economic development, the strengthening of the productive capacities of people in vulnerable situations, the promotion of social dialogue, labour rights and social protection, as well as inclusive and sustainable growth, the forging of partnerships and networks at the local, national, regional and international levels and the promotion of participatory governance and policymaking and all human rights,

Recognizing the contribution of the social and solidarity economy to decent work and inclusive and sustainable economies, to the promotion of international labour standards, including fundamental rights at work, to the improvement of the standard of living for all and to social innovation, including in the field of reskilling and upskilling,

Recognizing also the role that social and solidarity economy entities as local anchors can play in providing decent work opportunities and empowering women, including women in rural areas, youth, persons with disabilities and those in vulnerable situations, and recognizing their role in building community and social cohesion and fostering diversity, solidarity and protection and respect for traditional knowledge and cultures, including among Indigenous Peoples, as well as local communities,

Recognizing further that the social and solidarity economy contributes to more inclusive and sustainable economic growth by finding a new balance between economic efficiency and social and environmental resilience that fosters economic dynamism, encourages a just and sustainable digital transition, social and environmental protection and sociopolitical empowerment of individuals over decision-making processes and resources,

¹ A/75/982.

Recognizing that the social and solidarity economy can play a key role in eliminating poverty and catalysing social transformation, thus helping to achieve the objective of leaving no one behind and to achieve the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals, while ensuring social inclusion,

Recognizing also the role of the social and solidarity economy in promoting democracy and social justice, including by increasing social and solidarity economy workers' awareness of their human and labour rights, developing partnerships and alliances to achieve common goals, enhancing business potential, entrepreneurial and managerial capacities, strengthening productivity and competitiveness, and supporting social and technological innovation and participatory business models, and the need to facilitate access to international markets and institutional funding for social and solidarity economy entities,

Recognizing further that social dialogue and the protection of all labour rights contribute to the overall cohesion of societies and are crucial for a well-functioning and productive economy,

1. *Encourages* Member States to promote and implement national, local and regional strategies, policies and programmes for supporting and enhancing the social and solidarity economy as a possible model for sustainable economic and social development, taking into account national circumstances, plans and priorities by, inter alia, developing specific legal frameworks, where appropriate, for the social and solidarity economy, making visible, when feasible, the contribution of the social and solidarity economy in the compilation of national statistics and providing fiscal and public procurement incentives, acknowledging the social and solidarity economy in education curricula and capacity-building and research initiatives and reinforcing entrepreneurship and business support, including by facilitating access for social and solidarity economy entities to financial services and funding, and encourages the participation of social and solidarity economy actors in the policymaking process;

2. *Encourages* relevant entities of the United Nations development system, including United Nations country teams, to give due consideration to the social and solidarity economy as part of their planning and programming instruments, particularly the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, so as to provide support to States, upon their request and in accordance with their mandates and to identify, formulate, implement and assess coherent and enabling policy measures and frameworks for developing the social and solidarity economy as a tool for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, and in this regard acknowledges the work of the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Social and Solidarity Economy;

3. *Encourages* multilateral, international and regional financial institutions and development banks to support the social and solidarity economy, including through existing and new financial instruments and mechanisms adapted to all stages of development;

4. *Requests* the Secretary-General to prepare a report, within existing resources, in collaboration with the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Social and Solidarity Economy, on the implementation of the present resolution, taking into consideration the contribution of the social and solidarity economy to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and an inclusive, job-rich, resilient and sustainable recovery, and decides to include in the provisional agenda of its seventy-ninth session, under the item entitled "Sustainable development", a sub-item entitled "Promoting the social and solidarity economy for sustainable development".

*66th plenary meeting
18 April 2023*

Appendix 2

Speech by Denison Jayasooria¹ at the Anniversary Webinar for the UN Resolution on SSE, on behalf of ASEC

Delivered at the Anniversary Webinar for the United Nations General Assembly Resolution: “Promoting the Social and Solidarity Economy for Sustainable Development” held on 18 April 2024, organised by the UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Social and Solidarity Economy (UNTFSSSE)²

Good afternoon friends, in this global SSE community.

I bring you Salam and peace greetings from RIPESS (Intercontinental Network for the Promotion of Social Solidarity Economy) and ASEC (Asian Solidarity Economy Council) which has active partners in 14 Asian countries.³

I am delighted to join this webinar to share some reflections from the Asian perspective. Being part of the global SSE movement of grassroots organisations comprising activists, practitioners, and public intellectuals, we recognise that the UN resolution on SSE is one of the major breakthroughs in global advocacy. We in Asia, also acknowledge the major role played by the UNTFSSSE and partners like RIPESS in this process.

¹ Prof Datuk Dr Denison Jayasooria is the former ASEC Chair and currently the Head of Secretariat for the All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia on SDGs.

² A recording of the webinar is available at:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rvy1BQZDpho>

³ South Asia (5 countries): Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka; Southeast Asia (6 countries): Indonesia, Cambodia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand; East Asia (3 countries): Japan, China/Hong Kong, South Korea

We as Asians, note sadly that a year ago, only 3 member states, namely Indonesia, Japan and Mongolia were among the 43 endorsing countries. However, I am told that China, India, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan and Thailand participated actively during the negotiations. This is significant, and we can work towards enlisting state support for SSE.

Furthermore, a ground reality check will show that SSE models are striving in Asia at two levels.

SSE AS GRASSROOTS MOVEMENTS

First, there is a very dynamic movement at the grassroots all around Asia. This is evident in the work of ASEC and our partners through the many grassroots initiatives, which illustrate the dynamism of an alternative model of doing business and development, which is a transformative paradigm shift impacting economic, social, environmental and governance towards a more sustainable, inclusive and just development. This is well-illustrated by a few partners:

- The **HomeNet movements** in Pakistan, Thailand and the Philippines are clear examples of how CSO have brought together the informal network and home-based women workers into a collective for better bargaining and marketing, for protection from abuse and exploitation, and for better health care, especially for street vendors. This has resulted in increased income and better working conditions, thus, addressing exploitation. In Thailand, the informal sector, organised through HomeNet Thailand, also plays an advocacy role in ensuring Bangkok city officials take the views of the street vendors in local city plans. Both ILO through the “Resolution concerning decent work and the SSE” (2022) and RIPESS have played an active role in this global process.
- The **ASSEFA movement of self-help groups** of women in thousands of villages in Tamil Nadu, organising themselves into

cooperatives, have spearheaded community transformation projects impacting local economy through dairy and agricultural products as well as educational and training institutions. These self-help groups of well-organised and empowered women are also being elected into village committees and this is impacting overall village development.

- The **OA Organics of Malaysia** has over the years empowered indigenous forest-based communities in organic vegetable farming, which has transformed their lifestyles from 'hunter and gathers' into modern farmers whose organic products are sold in supermarkets in the city. This provides stable income and enables the Orang Asli to conserve their forest.
- Likewise, the **Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Network in China** has brought new models of sustainable agriculture as well as enhanced food security. CSA models are directly related to food sovereignty, rights of peasants and agroecology. According to FAO, "community supported agriculture (CSA) is one of the best examples of a successful, alternative food distribution system, providing real income to producers and affordable, healthy food for consumers."

SSE STATE-DRIVEN POLICIES

Second, there is also policy-level development. At the global level, many States and regions have SSE framework legislations. UN member states in Asia have adopted a favourable policy towards social economy, cooperative development and social enterprise development.

Let me illustrate with 5 examples from Asia:

- South Korea has a specific **social enterprise legislation**. Other countries like Bangladesh, Malaysia, Philippines and Singapore have public policies geared towards a favourable triple bottom line approach of balance between economic, social and

environment. A new category of social actors running social enterprises now floods the market.

- There are good state legislations and policies in **cooperative development**, such as in Indonesia which has provisions for community rural banks such as Bina Swadaya, and active micro-credit provisions in the Philippines that provide the policy framework for the setting up of micro-credit institutions which provide financial access.
- There is both legislation and a favourable policy for community land trusts for **forest-based communities**, especially in Nepal where forest users generate income and also act as conservationists.
- Parliamentarians are active in localising SDGs in Malaysia through the **All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia on SDGs**, a bipartisan, multi-stakeholder group. This has good potential to influence policies and legislations in SSE.
- There is an emerging new initiative by **faith-based organisations** in countries with Muslim majorities like Malaysia and Indonesia based on Islamic models of financing credit for the poor. One example is “Ar-Rahnu,” which is an alternative to the exploitative pawn shops. In this model, when an item of gold is pledged as a collateral, credit is provided at fair rates instead of interest.

Consolidating SSE in Asia

ILO has sponsored 12 SSE studies in Asian countries through the regional SSE mapping project on “Strengthening the Social and Solidarity Economy in Asia,” with active participation from ASEC. This is a very significant development in providing visibility for SSE in Asia and influencing governments.

ASEC is also undertaking a new publication entitled, “Building Inclusive Communities through SDGs and SSE Initiatives” which is a compilation of 14 SSE Asian case studies.

Let me make four recommendations to the UN Task Force and this international discussion:

1. ASEC calls upon the UN Task Force on SSE to establish an Asia-Pacific level taskforce to lobby state actors on SSE. ASEC and other regional networks can play an active role in impacting grassroots movements towards a greater articulation of their work using the lenses of SSE and SDGs.
2. ASEC appreciates the efforts in the production of an SSE Encyclopaedia. This is a very good effort. However, the Asian partners feel that Asian experiences were not adequately covered. SSE is a global movement and therefore, ASEC calls upon the UN Task Force to help facilitate regional documentation to give visibility for state actors to take notice.
3. ASEC calls on the UN Task Force to undertake 43 in-depth case studies of SSE organisations in realising SDGs in 15 countries using ILO guidelines.
4. ASEC in partnership with MySDG Academy will host the ASEAN SDG-SSE Summit in 2025 when Malaysia is chair of ASEAN. ASEC invites the UN Task Force on SSE, ILO and other partners to support this event. It will be good to use this regional event for greater visibility of SSE in Asia.

Thank you for giving ASEC this opportunity and we look forward to greater solidarity in accelerating the SDGs through SSE.

"Building Inclusive Communities through SDGs and SSE Initiatives" is a comprehensive compilation of case studies and analyses that demonstrate the transformative power of the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) across various communities in Asia. The book, edited by Denison Jayasooria and Benjamin R. Quiñones, Jr., presents a diverse range of SSE initiatives that have successfully empowered marginalised groups, fostered social inclusion, and promoted sustainable development.

Divided into five parts and fourteen case studies from eight Asian countries highlight how SSE initiatives have contributed to decent work opportunities, poverty alleviation, gender equality, quality education, and reduced inequalities, among other SDGs. Key themes emerging from the book include the importance of participatory governance, mutual aid, voluntary cooperation, and the primacy of people and social purpose over profit in SSE entities.

The book also examines the challenges faced by SSE entities and provides recommendations for strengthening their institutional capacities and scaling up their impact. It emphasizes the need for multi-stakeholder partnerships, supportive policy frameworks, and capacity building to create an enabling ecosystem for SSE.

"Building Inclusive Communities through SDGs and SSE Initiatives" serves as an invaluable resource for policymakers, development practitioners, academics, and anyone interested in the potential of SSE in advancing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.



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e ISBN 978-629-99436-1-7



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