

Session on Social Innovation and Social Solidarity Economy

This virtual side event was hosted on the 2-May-2023 at 7:00 pm IST and was co-organised by the United Nations Task Force on the Social and Solidarity Economy (UNTFSE) in partnership with Diesis Network, the Intercontinental Network for the Promotion of the Social Solidarity Economy (RIPESS) and the Canadian CED Network. It aimed to showcase the strategic value of the social and solidarity economy (SSE) in policy discussions on Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at a time when SSE is gaining global policy importance with the recent adoption of the UN General Assembly resolution “Promoting the social and solidarity economy for sustainable development” and the International Labour Conference resolution on “decent work and the social and solidarity economy”.



The participants at the Diesis session on Social Innovation and Social Solidarity Economy

These landmark documents define SSE as encompassing “enterprises, organisations and other entities that are engaged in economic, social and environmental activities to serve the collective or general interest, which is based on the principles of voluntary cooperation and mutual aid, democratic and participatory governance, autonomy and independence and the primacy of people and social purpose over the capital in the distribution and use of surpluses or profits, as well as assets...”. Speakers from all continents provided social innovation experiences through SSE initiatives that advance fundamentally more transformative ways to tackle the multiple crises facing people and the planet than the hitherto dominant “piecemeal” or “cosmetic” approaches to social innovation.

Kanika Verma, Associate Vice President, Development Alternatives, started her talk by touching on job creation and the jobless growth characteristic of the Indian economy. The emphasis on big companies and significant businesses is not leading to employment creation, and women, in particular, have been left behind, as the labour force participation rate exemplifies. This is where she segued the Work4Progress programme and noted how they operate in one of India's most backwards regions. She shared that in the W4P programme,



Kanika speaking at the Diesis session on Social Innovation and Social Solidarity Economy

the social innovation approach to create systemic shifts at the local level is about addressing the root causes and not focusing on the symptomatic aspect that is apparent. She highlighted that the programme went deep into the root causes of the problem, aided by the method of "deep listening" which allowed the team to grasp a more nuanced understanding of the problems that lay below the surface.

Through this, the programme was able to co-create solutions called "prototypes". These systemic prototypes aim to mobilise the community to engage with micromovements of change. One such prototype is the e-mobility network for women that seeks to address the issue of accessibility and safe mobility. Kanika made a point here that social innovation flips the question to put the community and women at the forefront of solving deep-rooted challenges instead of trying to work around them. Another aspect that she enumerated was how actors could come together to address the challenges, and that is where the District Entrepreneurship Coalition (DEC) comes in, which serves as a platform where various stakeholders and entrepreneurs can meet, initiate dialogue and help each other.

The final aspect touches upon the larger question of social innovation, which is transference. The situation and context will differ as the programme moves beyond the existing locations. She stated the importance of toolkits and methods being malleable enough to inculcate their context but robust enough to maintain the central aspects that have made them successful. It is crucial if results and outcomes are to be scaled and if micro-movements are to be mainstreamed.

In a post-event note shared with all the participants, Development Alternatives was recognised and exemplified as one of the two organisations with a comprehensive social innovation approach. This was marked by partnerships, alliances, or networks of multiple actors with complementary assets that create an "SSE ecosystem" for sustained transformative change. The work done in Uttar Pradesh, particularly the safe mobility network of e-rickshaws, was applauded for the systemic shifts it has created.