

June 2023



Monthly newsletter on issues
of sustainable development

ISSN No. 0974-5483 RNI No. 59360/94 | Vol. 33 | Issue No. 06

DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVES



Inclusive Entrepreneurship and Social Solidarity

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The author of the editorial, Kanika Verma, highlights the United Nations' resolution on promoting the social and solidarity economy for sustainable development. She emphasises on India's existing institutional structures and their potential to address poverty through economic and social empowerment. She suggests by embracing the social economy framework and engaging with the informal sector, she suggest that India can drive transition to an inclusive and equitable future.

Social and Solidarity Economy: A Path to Inclusive and Sustainable Development in India

India's young and expanding population presents significant economic potential, but challenges such as jobless growth, low female labour force participation, and inequality need to be taken up. In seeking to address these barriers, Shabnam Durani and Muskan Chawla discuss the potential that the Social and Solidarity Economy has in achieving inclusive and sustainable development.



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Soliga Tribe: A Thriving Example of Social Solidarity

The article authored by Raman Thapar, Smriti Ahuja, and Rashika Sharma sheds light on the exceptional circumstances of the Soligas, India's first tribal community residing within a tiger reserve. It delves into their remarkable journey of empowerment and self-reliance, along with their use of modern technologies to preserve their ancestral livelihood. The article also highlights the inspirational role played by Smt. Madamma within her community.

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Can Social and Solidarity Economy Be a Unifying Theme for Green and Decent Work in India?

In his article, Professor Shambhu Prasad, a General Management expert specialising in Strategy and Policy at the Institute of Rural Management Anand (IRMA), highlights the underappreciated potential of the social and solidarity economy in India. He argues that this lack of recognition hinders its ability to foster inclusivity and sustainability. Professor Prasad delves into the necessary conditions for the SSE to establish itself within the Indian context, shedding light on its transformative possibilities.



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Debasis Ray and Roopali Gupta share the inspiring journey of Mithun, a 35-year-old from Madhya Pradesh, India. Facing financial constraints, Mithun turned to photography for extra income. With support from the Work4Progress programme, he received guidance, training, and financial aid, expanding his business to include printing and mobile accessories. Mithun's story exemplifies the transformative impact of entrepreneurship on individuals and communities.

The views expressed in the articles in this newsletter are those of the authors and not necessarily those of Development Alternatives.

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Cover photo credit: Development Alternatives

Published By: Development Alternatives

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It's Time for India to Embrace Its Legacy of Social Economy: The UN Resolution Can Help

In Uttar Pradesh, India, there is a growing micro-system of women-led 'safe e-mobility networks' to respond to women's hampered mobility and connectivity (which prevents them from working or gaining an education) steered by 60 battery-run e-rickshaws that are connecting women and girls to healthcare and schools. It responds to women's severely constrained mobility and connectivity, which prevents them from working or gaining an education.

This microcosm has opened up a world of possibilities for women in the district of Mirzapur. 'Nothing can stop us now,' they have told me. But one wonders and frets about how this becomes visible and connected to the economy at large? Often such solutions are inhibited due to the lack of an enabling architecture for scaling or becoming part of what we would define as the 'mainstream' economy.

On 18 April 2023, the United Nations adopted a historic resolution on 'Promoting the Social and Solidarity Economy for Sustainable Development,' recognising its contribution to the areas of decent work, poverty alleviation, inclusion, social transformation, and promotion of international labour standards and fundamental rights at work and ultimately for achievement and localisation of sustainable development goals (SDGs).¹ The social economy typically comprises associations, cooperatives, foundations,

mutual societies, non-profit organisations, and social enterprises.

The Indian economy, measured in GDP terms, has been growing at an impressive annual rate of 6.5% or more in the last decade, leaving in its wake, however, deepening inequality, lack of social cohesion, and worrying questions about the effects of economic growth on environmental degradation. With its ability to be inclusive, generate livelihood opportunities, and innovate solutions within ecological limits, the social economy opens the door to new institutional and business structures, facilitating the transition to a fairer, more inclusive, and sustainable economy for a country such as India.

Our country has a great legacy and a head start on building institutional structures for equitable economic activity, serving as an instrument for government agencies to tackle issues of poverty through economic and social empowerment. Amul remains a shining example of a large-scale cooperative. The Self-Help Group movement in India is the largest social empowerment initiative globally, with now 92 million women as members. There are also noteworthy examples of social enterprises that create social and environmental impact through innovation in business models and by involving people in their supply chains.

Scaling any of these, however, also comes with its set of challenges, where community




voices can get lost, limitations in addressing local unemployment, and their restricted impact on the local economy.

India can add another relatively unexplored dimension within the broader discourse on social economy structures. Greater engagement under the social economy framework with the informality within which India's economy lives and breathes could propel its transition to an inclusive and equitable future. This would mean recognition of the potential of local, everyday entrepreneurs (who remain invisible in the landscape of India's mainstream economy) in creating social and economic impact that is deep-rooted and sustainable.

Inclusive entrepreneurship initiatives of Development Alternatives rely on the use of social innovation tools and methods to create local 'entrepreneurship ecosystems' in which a large number of actors work collaboratively to make it easier for people, especially women and youth, to set up businesses and run them profitably. Like the ones in Mirzapur—where ordinary people who were excluded from becoming entrepreneurs—becoming successful business persons, creating an average of at least three jobs, and driving the system as powerful change agents within their community and economy.

With this added dimension to the social economy, there are many ways India can benefit from the UN resolution and, in turn, its adoption. It can drive policy reforms that acknowledge reality and capitalise upon entrepreneurial energies in the form of

new modes of ownership, shared enabling infrastructure with (digital) connections to the larger ecosystem, unlocking of new market forces (with public procurement and information abundance), innovative mechanisms of socially driven capital like peer-to-peer funds or social stock exchange and the definition of new indicators for impact and measurement of well-being.

With the social economy as a backbone, 'causal collisions' or alternative narratives of the e-mobility network will become the norm in this road less travelled where progress is based on social value creation, inclusion, and equity, beyond just money. The thought pieces in this newsletter share our belief that a new social economy of India, built on principles of social innovation, is not only a befitting parallel to capitalist economics but a much-needed pathway for its bold transformation that will present itself as a true example of a future-fit country and help build a new world order. 

Endnotes

1 United Nations. 2023. Promoting the social and solidarity economy for sustainable development. Details available at <https://unsse.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/A-77-L60.pdf>

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Social and Solidarity Economy: A Path to Inclusive and Sustainable Development in India

India has one of the youngest populations in the world with 1 million young Indians entering the employment market every month [1]. By 2027, India is projected to have the world's largest working-age population [2]. Its demographic dividend and huge economic opportunities offer immense potential for economic growth and job creation in the coming years. However, to fully realise the benefits, there is a need to build a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable economy that not only leads to economic development but also simultaneously addresses social, economic, and environmental challenges.

Although India is one of the fastest growing economies, with its gross domestic product (GDP) touching US\$3.5 trillion, it is falling behind in other socio-economic indicators. India has been a victim of jobless growth, high migration rates, low female labour force participation rate, and inequality, among other factors. Estimates suggest that India will need to create 70 million new jobs over the next 10 years to solve the job crisis; however, with the current growth rate of 6.5%, only 24 million jobs will be created, leaving behind '46 million missing jobs' [3]. In addition, female labour force participation is as low as 30% and has remained fairly constant for the last three years. The usual strategy towards growth has crippled India's overall development and is indicating a new economic paradigm that emphasises inclusive growth and equitable distribution of resources and opportunities, making a transition towards a social and solidarity economy (SSE).

SSE, also known as social economy, is an alternative economic model that prioritises social well-being over profit maximisation. Globally, social economy accounts for about 7% of the GDP and up to 12% of the employment rate in some countries [4]. Owing to its growing prominence in recent years, the United Nations General Assembly has adopted a resolution on promoting the social and solidarity economy (SSE) for sustainable development, as this can also contribute

to the achievement and localization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) [5]. India has been one of the pioneers in innovating significant and influential solutions in socio-economic empowerment models based on principles of solidarity, as evidenced by the emergence of community enterprises, associations, self-help groups (SHGs), and producers' cooperatives. Successful demonstration of these models influenced other organisations to recognise and adopt social practices. Over the last few years, these models have provided institutional structure for equitable economic activities, serving as an instrument for government agencies to tackle issues of poverty through economic and social empowerment.

The three critical pillars of the SSE include inclusive economic growth, job creation, and social cohesion and empowerment. Development Alternatives Group, since its inception in 1982, has been contributing to the promotion of SSE in the country by focusing on developing inclusive and sustainable solutions to the challenges of poverty, unemployment, and the environment, and applying at scale through multi-stakeholder partnerships. Development Alternatives has adopted a unique social innovation approach that is 'social in purpose, systemic in nature, and inclusive by design'. This approach is based on collaboration, community-led, and bottom-up action principles.

Through its flagship programme, Work4Progress (W4P), Development Alternatives is enabling under-represented groups such as youth and women to access entrepreneurship opportunities, thereby leading to social inclusion, quality employment, and sustainable economic growth. It has also led to the development of advanced tools and methodologies for key processes of listening to multi-stakeholder perspectives, co-creating solutions with the communities, prototyping these solutions, and sharing learning to accelerate impact at scale.

This initiative has contributed towards



Sixty women-led e-Rickshaws have built a solidarity network in the Mirzapur district of Uttar Pradesh, leading to economic empowerment and bringing women to the forefront of mobility challenges that inhibit them from being socially and economically empowered. This movement has created access to safe transport for school-going students, reducing the drop-out rate of girl students by 15-20%. These women e-Rickshaw entrepreneurs are leading micro-movements of change in their communities by inspiring their peers to pursue entrepreneurship and mainstreaming it in rural geographies, thus building a pathway towards social solidarity economy.

different indicators aligned with SSE in terms of bringing inclusivity and diversity in the enterprises, unlocking barriers in enterprise support services, and enhancing the sustainability of enterprises in 350+ villages of Uttar Pradesh. The programme has brought 5000+ individuals from the most marginalised communities into the purview of opportunity-driven entrepreneurship, enabling them to make a shift from need-based income-generation activities. Furthermore, W4P has helped co-create a diversity of enterprise models with communities and contextualised based on local requirements. In the last five years, 120+ enterprise models have been identified, and validated in seven districts of Uttar Pradesh and are now being replicated in states including Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Maharashtra, Bihar, and Andhra Pradesh under various other entrepreneurship development initiatives.

SSE can foster a fair, adaptable, and sustainable future for everyone. Development Alternatives remains committed to spearheading the advancement of SSE by mainstreaming bottom-up action, catalysing entrepreneurship as a pathway for job creation at scale, and prioritising the integration of women and marginalised

rural communities into the economy. Going forward, a crucial aspect of this effort will involve building solutions that unlock macro-level barriers while being cognisant of the social and environmental fronts.

Endnotes

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Soliga Tribe: A Thriving Example of Social Solidarity

With a population of 40,000, the Soliga tribe is one of the indigenous tribes living in harmonious communion with nature in the Biligiri Ranganathaswamy (BR) Hills Tiger Reserve in the Chamarajanagara district of Karnataka. Revering mother nature, they rely on non-timber forest products (NTFPs) for sustenance. In the local Kannada language, the Soligas are known as the 'Children of Bamboo', a name that embodies their deep connection to the forest and their astute understanding of its resources, particularly honey and other forest produce.

However, their strong sense of social solidarity was put to the test when their rights came under threat. For generations, the Soligas had called the BR Hills forest their home, but when the area was designated as a tiger reserve, their habitation entitlements were threatened. Through resilience and collective action, they triumphed. Under the Forest Rights Act, their community and individual rights were restored. It marked a significant victory for the Soligas, making them the first tribal community in India to reside within the core of a tiger reserve.

Recognising the Soligas' unity and determination, the Indian Micro Enterprises Development Foundation (IMEDF), a

social enterprise of the Development Alternatives Group, partnered with ATREE and Keystone Foundation, with support from the Ministry of MSME, Government of India, and established the BR Hills Wild Bee Honey Cluster. Within this cluster, 560 Soliga tribals, including 50 females, found institutional support through the Shri Biligiri Ranganathaswamy Soligara Samskarana Sangha—a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) comprising 13 board members, including 4 remarkable female representatives.

Preserving their ancestral livelihood, the Soligas continued the tradition of honey extraction from honeycombs by employing modern technologies to enhance efficiency and safety. They embraced protective gear, such as face masks, to shield themselves from bee stings, thus replacing the traditional practice of using fire. To facilitate the processing of raw honey, a Common Facility Centre (CFC) was set up in the Chamarajanagar district. Through this intervention, the cluster launched its brand, Adavi, accompanied by a dedicated website, www.adavi.co.in. By adopting sustainable harvesting practices, the Soligas ensured the well-being of indigenous bee species—*Apis Dorsata*, *Apis Cerana* and *Apis Florea*, popularly known as Rock bees due to



Madamma - President of BR Hills Soliga Samskarana Sangha in Karnataka at the Adavi outlet

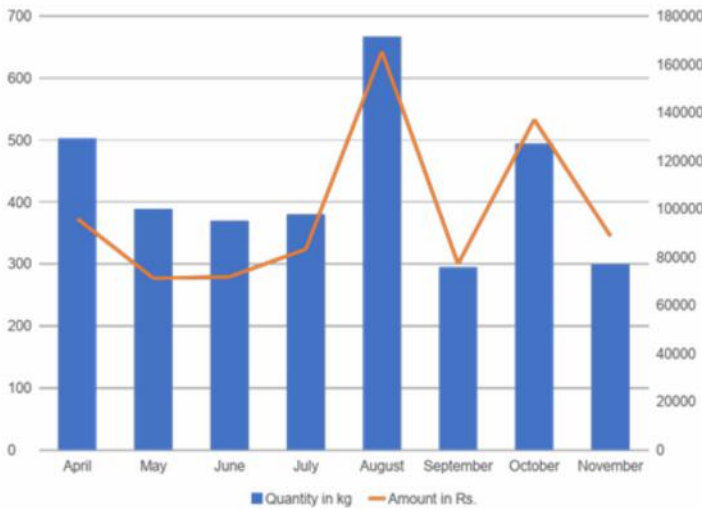
their honeycombs found on rocks in the Western Ghats. The Soligas not only protected their community members but also safeguarded the region’s biodiversity.

Thanks to the establishment of the cluster, the Soligas witnessed improvements in their livelihoods, gaining access to essential healthcare and education facilities. The Soliga community also benefitted immensely from the knowledge of one of their own. Smt Madamma, aged 43, is an inspiring woman who lives in the Muttugadagadde hamlet within the BR Hills. Despite her formal education only

Smt Madamma emerged as a role model within her community, garnering admiration when she was elected as a Panchayat member. She embarked on numerous developmental initiatives for her village and became an active member and the President of the BR Hills Soliga Samskarana Sangha—an association dedicated to NTFP processing. Now empowered and self-reliant, Smt Madamma aspires for every tribal woman to experience the same sense of independence and agency she has found.

Way Forward

The Soliga community acts as a good example for fostering the contribution to the social and solidarity economy by building sustainable enterprises towards a just transition. They have helped build a positive impact on the environment and society by promoting sustainable consumption and production patterns taking into account challenges, particularly climate change.



The rise in sales of NTFP products after the intervention

extending to the fifth grade, she possesses extensive knowledge of various NTFPs, a legacy she inherited from her parents and husband and one which she intends to pass down to future generations.

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Can Social and Solidarity Economy Be a Unifying Theme for Green and Decent Work in India?

Can a social and solidarity economy (SSE) be a unifying theme to capture the multitudes of green and decent work that is spread across the length and breadth of India? In the absence of a separate legal entity that recognises social enterprises and size being the only criteria for distinguishing different enterprises (nano, micro, small, or medium), the synergistic potential of many rural, social, and collective enterprises and their contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) often go unrecognised. Despite SSE being discussed in many international fora and resolutions by the United Nations, it is yet to be part of the Indian policy discourse and practice.

For this to materialise, certain conditions need to be met in the Indian context, which will give it more weightage and applicability at the policy level. SSE needs to be linked to the alternative visions of organising the economy and polity that are more rooted in India's cultural ethos. In India, SSE can draw inspiration from organisations following non-hierarchical modes in Indian economy and polity in terms of 'oceanic circles' as envisaged by Mahatma Gandhi in the 1940s and the concept of SEWA, 'We are poor but so many', introduced by Ela Bhatt in the 1970s. More recently, 'Anubandh' or the quest for Building an Economy of Nurturance (BEN) and strengthening local economies through a 100-mile radius has been experimented with by SEWA and several other movements. Through Vikalp Sangam, these movements have captured ecological democracy and the rich and diverse innovations from civic action that India has been a leader in. Thinking about anchaals, or bio-regions, as a unit of analysis beyond individual villages helps to rethink ways of organising communities for swaraj or self-reliance today. Essentially, there needs to be a reorganisation of the relationship between the community, state, and market with the community at the centre. At the same time, the other

elements work towards realising the aspirations emerging out of that space, with substantial consideration of the limits of nature being taken into account concurrently.

It should be noted that this is an exercise that requires rethinking of SSE itself and to adapt and to be receptive to the respective geographies. To make SSE successful, social innovation, an important element, has to be implemented. This will require significant experimentation and building local entrepreneurial ecosystems. Tools have to be formed that would re-establish community listening as a precondition for other social processes to follow. This is a significant ask as it requires a complete reorganisation of the systems and processes that are in practice, but these steps are necessary if any meaningful outcome is to emerge. Likewise, there needs to be a rethinking of the obsession with scale and metrics that focus solely on reaching mythical unicorn statuses. Entrepreneurship that gives primacy to purpose over profit cannot scale in the same manner as celebrated start-ups. Thus, newer metrics are required for sustainable enterprises.

Designing metrics for impact is an elaborate academic exercise. However, projects (government or otherwise) need to find simple metrics that capture the **4Es** of the entrepreneurial ecosystem. These include the **entrepreneur** and their ability to be an innovative change agent, the growth of the **enterprise**, the connectedness of the **ecosystem**, and the contribution to the local **economy**. Often, metrics only look at enterprise growth, and the other 3Es are detached from the analysis. Recreating the framework also requires accommodating an environment more focused on an ecosystem that contributes to a healthier SSE rather than individual superhero entrepreneurship. This form of a framework requires significant management skills, capabilities, more system-oriented, and facilitative but less technical or domain



Women artisans at work in the Common Facility Centre at IMEDF Matcraft Cluster, West Bengal.

specific. Mapping systems, finding leverage points, and thinking together for collaborative experimentation require innovation brokers to get dissimilar actors to talk. Civil society organisations are increasingly getting better at it, but academic institutions too can facilitate such platforms.

Moreover, the ongoing discussions on social stock exchange, another form of SSE, is a great opportunity to ensure that ethical investments move towards supporting the above processes. With significant access to information and outreach of ICT in rural India, the next phase is to ensure greater democratisation of the economy by rooting for SSE in all our planning efforts. This shift is unlikely to

happen automatically, as we have seen in the post-pandemic recovery with growing inequality between rich and poor and among regions of India too. By reimagining SSE within the Indian context, rooted in cultural ethos and alternative visions of organising the economy and fostering social innovation, India can create a more inclusive and sustainable future.

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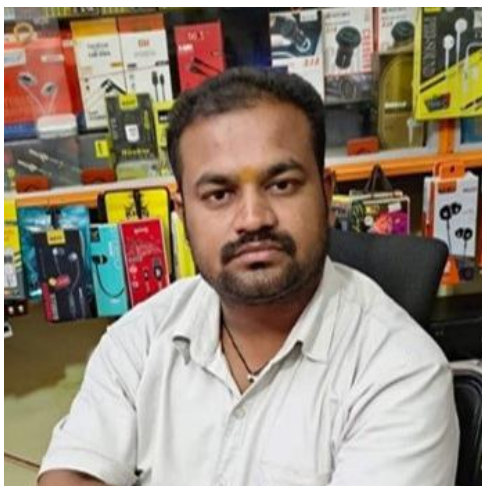
The Power of Entrepreneurship: How Mithun Uplifted His Family and Community

Thirty-five-year-old Mithun hails from the Niwari district of Madhya Pradesh. He is the eldest among his four siblings and has been shouldering the responsibilities of his family from a very young age, as the meagre income from farming was not enough to meet the needs of his six-member family.

Driven by a desire to uplift his family's circumstances, Mithun embarked on a journey to explore alternative avenues. He realised that his passion for photography could serve as an additional source of income. Using the savings of his father, Mithun acquired a professional camera. Month after month, he diligently captured moments and was able to make a profit of Rs 12000.

Mithun's dreams of expanding his photography business started to take shape, but he faced a common challenge—lack of knowledge and support. Fortunately, his path aligned with the Work4Progress programme team committed to support aspiring entrepreneurs. Mithun saw an opportunity and shared his ambitions with the team, expressing his desire to establish his own enterprise.

Mithun received valuable business insights, helping him craft a robust business plan. Additionally, he received aid in areas such as bookkeeping, marketing strategies, and comprehensive entrepreneurship training. To propel his enterprise even further, he



secured financial assistance of Rs 30,000 through the Micro Credit Facility.

Inspired by the opportunity at hand, Mithun not only focused on photography but also delved into the world of printing and mobile accessories. This diversification of his business ventures proved fruitful, resulting in a significant increase in his monthly profits to Rs 50,000.

With newfound success and financial stability, Mithun was able to aid his younger brothers in establishing their small businesses in the food and transportation sectors. This empowerment brought about a positive transformation in their lives and allowed Mithun's family to have a decent and comfortable life. Moreover, as an entrepreneur, Mithun employed three people, thereby contributing to the local economy and fostering community growth.

Mithun's journey exemplifies the profound impact that entrepreneurship can have on an individual's life. It not only changed his financial situation but also empowered him to make a difference in the lives of his loved ones and create opportunities for others. Mithun's story is a shining example of how entrepreneurship can transform lives and uplift entire communities.

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The Goodness of Bael Juice

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Kangpokpi Pineapple Processing Cluster
Manipur

Major Products: Pineapple candy, jam, pickle

The Delight of Cold Coffee

Vishakhapatnam Coffee Cluster
Andhra Pradesh

Major Products: Robusta & Arabica Coffee powder



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