

# Enabling Social Innovation in Zambia

## Country Snapshot

**Social innovation: "the processes and outcomes of developing novel approaches to address societal challenges facing people and planet." <sup>1</sup>**

This snapshot represents a descriptive, non-exhaustive overview of key highlights from Zambia's social innovation ecosystem.

 Direct focus on social innovation    Connected but indirect focus on social innovation    No focus on social innovation

## INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

### Official Definition of Social Innovation

There is **no official legal definition** of social innovation in Zambia. Public actors and development partners use **implicit working definitions** linked to *inclusive growth, innovation, youth empowerment, sustainability and SDG delivery*, particularly within national development planning and donor-supported programmes (2015–).

### Government Body for Social Innovation

No dedicated ministry or agency for social innovation. Relevant public bodies include:

- **Ministry of Technology and Science (2021–):** oversees innovation, digitalisation and research policy.
- **Ministry of Community Development and Social Services:** implements community development, inclusion and social protection programmes.
- **Ministry of Green Economy and Environment (2021–):** leads green growth, climate and sustainability innovation.

### Government Strategy for Social Innovation

No standalone strategy. Social innovation appears within:

- **Eighth National Development Plan (2022–2026):** innovation-led growth, inclusion, youth employment and sustainability.
- **National Green Growth Strategy (2024–2030):** climate-aligned innovation and green enterprises.

Innovation is also embedded in sectoral MSME, youth and digital strategies.

### Policies, Laws & Regulations

- **Eighth National Development Plan (2022):** innovation, entrepreneurship, inclusive development.
- **National MSME Development Policy (2020):** enterprise support and innovation.
- **Gender Equity and Equality Act (2015):** enables women-led enterprises and inclusion.
- **Public Procurement Act (2020):** allows limited non-price criteria, indirectly enabling social value.

No legal category for social enterprises or social innovation.



### Official Statistics

No dedicated statistics on social innovation. The **Central Statistical Office** collects data on MSMEs, cooperatives and NGOs, but **does not classify social enterprises or social innovation activities**.



### Government Programs

Key programmes and initiatives include:

- **UNDP Accelerator Lab Zambia (2019–)**: experimentation and scaling of local solutions.
- **Youth Empowerment and Skills Programmes**: entrepreneurship and innovation support.
- **MSME and innovation grant programmes** under sector ministries and donor partnerships.

## ECOSYSTEM



### Stakeholders

Main actors include **BongoHive, Impact Hub Lusaka, Jacaranda Hub, UNDP Accelerator Lab**, NGOs, universities and corporate foundations.



### Networks

Active but informal networks include **startup and MSME communities**, youth entrepreneurship groups, NGO coalitions and cooperative networks. **No national social innovation network** exists.



### Support Organisations (Non-financial)

Key types: innovation hubs, incubators and accelerators, donor-funded programmes, NGOs, research institutes and community organisations. Prominent examples include **BongoHive, Impact Hub Lusaka, Jacaranda Hub, UNDP and SNV**.



### Support Initiatives

Common initiatives include **incubation and acceleration programmes, innovation challenges, entrepreneurship training, digital skills programmes and agribusiness innovation support**, largely donor-funded.



### Collaboration

Public–private–civil collaboration exists but is **project-based rather than systemic**, often led by donors. Events include **hackathons, innovation challenges and demo days** hosted by hubs. **No national social innovation awards**.

## FINANCE



### Financing Schemes

No consolidated national estimate of funding for social innovation. Financing is **embedded within development finance, MSME support and donor programmes**, with only part explicitly targeting social innovation.

## Key Types of Financing

- **Public:** MSME grants, youth and community development funds.
- **Private/philanthropy:** corporate foundations, CSR initiatives.
- **Finance sector:** microfinance and SME lending.
- **International:** World Bank, UNDP, USAID, EU, bilateral donors.
- **Instruments:** grants, soft loans, blended finance, microcredit, limited equity.

## Inclusiveness of Financing

Targeting for **women, youth and rural communities** is common in donor and government programmes. Support for **persons with disabilities and Indigenous/traditional communities** exists but is limited and weakly documented.

# SOCIETY

## Public Awareness

Social innovation is **rarely referenced explicitly** in public discourse. Media and policy discussions focus on *entrepreneurship, youth empowerment, innovation, sustainability and digitalisation*. Awareness is **moderate and urban-centred**.

## Research

Academic research on social innovation is **limited and fragmented**, appearing within development studies, entrepreneurship and innovation research, mainly at **the University of Zambia**. Practitioner research is led by **UNDP, World Bank and donor programmes**.

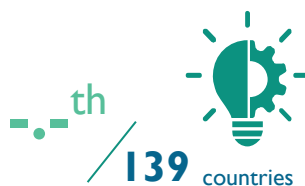
## Education & Human Capital

No formal degree programmes specifically titled “social innovation”. Elements are embedded in **entrepreneurship, development studies and innovation curricula**. Informal training via hubs and donor programmes is widespread. **No national graduate estimates**.

## Entrepreneurship



**EIU Business Environment:**  
lower-middle performer regionally.



**Innovation capacity**  
Zambia ranks below global median, with weak innovation outputs.[]

Global Innovation Index 2024



**GEM:** high necessity-driven entrepreneurship; social entrepreneurship present but not systematically measured.

## Social & Environmental Consciousness

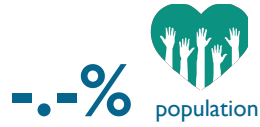


### Solidarity

moderate community support and informal helping.



**Political Participation:** moderate, with declining voter engagement.



### Volunteering

mid-range in CAF World Giving Index.



### Sustainability

low EPI ranking overall but increasing climate-policy commitment.

Environmental Performance Index 2024