

# Enabling Social Innovation in Ethiopia



POWERED BY 1Family Foundation

## 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 Ethiopia'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



No single formal legal definition of "social innovation" is established in Ethiopian primary law. Notable examples of Ethiopian social innovation include Tebita Ambulance — founded by Dr. Kibret Adebe — which pioneered Ethiopia's first private emergency medical services company in direct collaboration with the Addis Ababa Health Bureau. <sup>2 3</sup>

### Government Body for Social Innovation



- Ministry of Innovation and Technology (MInT): The lead body for digital transformation, ICT policy and the national innovation ecosystem. Oversees Digital Ethiopia 2025. <sup>4</sup>
- Ethiopian Academy of Sciences (EAS): Provides scientific advisory functions and connects research to national development needs. <sup>5</sup>
- Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research (EIAR): Leads agricultural innovation; key driver of social innovation in food systems and rural livelihoods. <sup>5</sup>
- Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA): Oversees social protection, youth employment and labour market programmes. <sup>6</sup>
- Federal Micro and Small Enterprises Development Agency (FeMSEDA): Supports MSME development, business formalisation and entrepreneurship. <sup>6</sup>

### Government Strategy for Social Innovation



- Homegrown Economic Reform Agenda and Ten-Year Development Plan 2021–2030: Commits to digital economy growth and innovation-driven economic transformation. <sup>4</sup>
- Digital Ethiopia 2025: National digital transformation strategy targeting 100% mobile and internet access by 2030. <sup>4</sup>
- STI Policy Implementation Strategy 2022 (approved by Council of Ministers): An eight-pillar strategy covering human resource development, research infrastructure, technology innovation and intellectual property. Developed with ITC support. <sup>2</sup>

### Policies, Laws & Regulations



- STI Policy Implementation Strategy 2022: Establishes the operational framework for Ethiopia's national innovation system, including a proposed National Research Foundation. <sup>2</sup>
- Proclamation No. 686/2010 on Science, Technology and Innovation: Foundational legal framework for STI governance; under review. <sup>5</sup>
- Civil Society Organisations (CSO) Proclamation (revised): Revised framework enabling civil society engagement in social innovation. <sup>6</sup>
- Climate Resilient Green Economy (CRGE) Strategy: Governs Ethiopia's climate commitments; drives innovation in green agriculture, energy and land management. <sup>8</sup>

## Official Statistics

**130th/133** GII 2024 ranking (score: 12.3) — dropped 5 places; Ethiopia has 2 top African S&T clusters, strongest in scientific publications.<sup>2</sup>

**0.51%** of GDP invested in R&D — below the AU-recommended 1% target.<sup>3</sup>

**16.7%** internet penetration (2021); government target is 100% by 2030 under Digital Ethiopia 2025.<sup>4</sup>

**40%** of children face multidimensional poverty, driving grassroots social innovation in health, education and food security.<sup>4</sup>

## Government Programs

- **Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP):** One of Africa's largest social protection programmes, supporting 8+ million rural households.<sup>4</sup>
- **Urban Productive Safety Net Programme (UPSNP):** Urban extension of PSNP targeting city-based vulnerable households.<sup>4</sup>
- **ITC NTFV STI Programme:** Developed the STI Implementation Strategy and strengthened industry-academia linkages.<sup>2</sup>
- **Digital Ethiopia 2025 Sector Programmes:** Encompass digital literacy, e-government, open data and the technology and innovation ecosystem.<sup>4</sup>

# ECOSYSTEM

## Stakeholders

- **Tebita Ambulance:** A GII 2024-featured social enterprise that pioneered emergency medical services; works with policymakers to advance national EMS standards.<sup>2</sup>
- **Addis Ababa University (AAU):** Leading academic institution driving scientific research and innovation outputs in Ethiopia's top S&T cluster.<sup>2</sup>
- **IceAddis Innovation Hub:** One of Ethiopia's earliest innovation hubs, providing co-working, mentoring and acceleration for tech startups.<sup>4</sup>
- **UNDP Ethiopia Accelerator Lab:** Focuses on community-driven innovation, foresight and experimentation at scale.<sup>1</sup>
- **Reach for Change Ethiopia:** Supports social entrepreneurs building businesses with positive social impact.<sup>1</sup>

## Support Initiatives

Common support modalities include innovation hub incubation, ITC STI capacity building, UNDP community innovation and World Bank/AfDB social protection and enterprise support.<sup>2 7 8</sup>

## Collaboration

The STI Implementation Strategy explicitly targets stronger industry-academia-government collaboration, identifying weak linkages as a core constraint. The ITC NTFV co-creation process brought government, industry and academia together.<sup>2 3</sup>

# FINANCE

## Financing Schemes



- Government: PSNP, UPSNP, FeMSEDA grants, university research and innovation funds. <sup>6</sup>
- International donors: World Bank, AfDB, EU, ITC NTFV, USAID, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. <sup>6, 7</sup>
- UN agencies: UNDP, UNICEF, WFP, ILO — across social protection, health, food security and enterprise support. <sup>7</sup>

## Financing Inclusivity



Financing is predominantly directed at rural and vulnerable populations. Women, youth and smallholder farmers are priority groups. Ethiopia's startup financing ecosystem is early-stage relative to peers like Kenya and Nigeria. <sup>6</sup>

# SOCIETY

## Public Awareness of Social Innovation



Awareness is growing, particularly in Addis Ababa, where the innovation hub community, universities and international organisations drive discourse. In rural areas, the concept is embedded in livelihoods and community cooperatives. <sup>3, 4</sup>

## Research



Ethiopia has 2 top African S&T clusters (GII 2024), led by Addis Ababa and driven by scientific publications from AAU. The GII 2024 case study on Tebita Ambulance highlights growing research on social entrepreneurship. <sup>2, 3, 9</sup>

## Education & Human Capital



Entrepreneurship and technology education are embedded in university curricula under Digital Ethiopia 2025. TVET programmes are a priority for youth employability. University-to-market pipelines remain weak. <sup>2, 4</sup>

## Entrepreneurship



130<sup>th</sup> / 133 countries 

Enabling conditions for business

GII 2024 (score: 12.3); 6th in Sub-Saharan Africa; noted as an overperformer in the low-income group. <sup>2</sup>

100% / 100 countries 

Innovation capacity



## Social & Environmental Consciousness



**Solidarity**



**Participation**

-.-%



population

**Volunteering**

Ethiopia-specific data not separately reported in the 2024 index. <sup>10</sup>

CAFWorld Giving Index 2024



..th

/ 180 countries

**Sustainability**

Ethiopia-specific EPI ranking not publicly available at time of publication. <sup>11</sup>

Environmental Performance Index (EPI) 2024

