

Enabling Social Innovation in Eritrea

Country Snapshot

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

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

Note: Given Eritrea's unique development context — including strict self-reliance policies, limited private sector activity and constrained civil society space — this snapshot focuses on state-led and community-based social innovation within those structural boundaries.

✓ 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 formal legal definition of "social innovation" has been identified in Eritrean primary law. The government's self-reliance philosophy is itself a form of state-directed social innovation: community-based development driven by government mobilisation and citizen participation. ^{2,3}

Government Body for Social Innovation ✓



- Ministry of Finance and National Development (MFND): Primary development planning and coordination body. ²
- Ministry of Agriculture: Oversees community-based agricultural development including micro-dam construction and climate-smart farming. ⁴
- Ministry of Health: Leads community health innovation, including the achieved 95% under-5 vaccination rate and 94% village-level FGM abandonment. ⁵
- Ministry of Education: Administers school access expansion, vocational training and literacy programmes. ⁵
- National Confederation of Eritrean Workers (NCEW) and National Union of Eritrean Youth (NUEY): Mobilise civic participation; key partners with UNDP for youth employment. ⁶
- UNDP Eritrea: Supports government-aligned programming in environment, renewable energy, food security and capacity building. ⁶

Government Strategy for Social Innovation ✓



- Eritrea National Charter 1994: Foundational national vision emphasising social equity, justice and self-reliant development. ³
- UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2022–2026: Aligns UN programming with government priorities across Human Development and Wellbeing and Inclusive, Climate-Resilient Economy. ³
- UN Five Core SDG Priorities 2025: Food systems, data, climate, social protection and communications. ⁷

Policies, Laws & Regulations



- Eritrea Environmental Protection, Management and Rehabilitation Framework 2017: Places human wellbeing at the centre of sustainable development; supports community participation in environmental protection. ⁸
- Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) 2018 (updated 2022): Commits Eritrea to climate mitigation and adaptation, including renewable energy and climate-resilient agriculture. ⁸

Official Statistics



- 95% under-5 vaccination rate — Eritrea leads its sub-region in child health outcomes. ⁵
 - 94% of Eritrea's 2,840 villages achieved Open Defecation-Free (ODF) status in 2024, up from 32% in 2015. ⁷
 - 94% of villages achieved FGM abandonment in 2024, driven by legal enforcement and social mobilisation. ⁵
 - 66.7% increase in fish production between 2023 and 2024 (from 16,000 to 18,431 tonnes), creating livelihoods for women and youth. ⁷
- Note: Eritrea is not currently included in the GII 2024 due to insufficient innovation data coverage. ²

Government Programs



- Community-based agricultural development: Micro-dam construction, irrigation expansion and climate-smart farming led by the Ministry of Agriculture. ⁴
- WASH Community Programme: Community-led water, sanitation and hygiene improvements achieving 94% ODF status nationwide. ⁷
- UNDP Youth Employment and Skills Development: In partnership with NCEW and NUEY, develops workplace skills and youth employability. ⁶
- Renewable Energy Access Programme: Promotes access to modern, efficient and affordable renewable energy for rural communities. ⁶
- Fish Production Infrastructure Programme: Establishment of ice production facilities and processing infrastructure to boost coastal community livelihoods. ⁷

ECOSYSTEM

Stakeholders



- UN Country Team (UNDP, FAO, UNICEF, WFP, WHO): Provide technical and financial support aligned with government priorities across all SDG areas. ^{6 7}
- National Confederation of Eritrean Workers (NCEW) and National Union of Eritrean Youth (NUEY): State-recognised civic bodies implementing skills, employment and development programmes. ⁶
- Communities and local governance structures: Primary vehicles for grassroots social change within the GoSE self-reliance model. ³
- Diaspora networks: Provide private remittances supplementing the national welfare system. ²



Support Initiatives



Support initiatives are government-coordinated and UN-aligned. The UN Annual Results Report 2024 highlights partnerships advancing food systems, climate resilience, WASH and digital communications. ^{6 7}

Collaboration



Collaboration is governed through the UNSDCF 2022–2026 framework, developed through inclusive stakeholder consultations. Inter-agency collaboration within the UN Country Team is the primary coordination mechanism. ³

FINANCE

Financing Schemes

- Government budget: Self-reliance funding for national service-based community development, agricultural infrastructure and social services. ²
- UN agencies (UNDP, FAO, UNICEF, WFP, WHO): Project-specific technical and financial assistance for SDG priority areas. ⁴
- GEF and bilateral donors: Environment, climate and food security grants through UN-facilitated programming. ⁸
- Diaspora remittances: A significant informal financing source for household-level welfare and livelihoods. ²

Financing Inclusivity

Financing channels prioritise community-level development in rural areas, with an explicit focus on women and youth in agriculture and livelihood programmes. ^{4 6}

SOCIETY

Public Awareness of Social Innovation

Public awareness of "social innovation" as a formal concept is limited. However, community-driven social change through self-reliance, national service and mutual aid is deeply embedded in national culture. The FGM abandonment programme, WASH coverage and health achievements reflect powerful community-led social innovation. ^{5 7}

Research

Formal research capacity is limited and primarily conducted through government ministries and UN-supported programme evaluations. UNSDCF priorities include data improvement in 2025. ^{3 7}

Education & Human Capital

Eritrea has achieved significant progress in expanding access to education. Vocational and technical training is delivered through government TVET programmes. No social innovation or entrepreneurship-specific qualification pathway exists. ⁵

Entrepreneurship



Enabling conditions for business



Innovation capacity



Formal private sector entrepreneurship is significantly constrained by the GoSE's self-reliance policy. Eritrea is not included in the GII 2024.

Community-level micro-enterprise and cooperative models exist informally, particularly in agriculture and fishing. ^{2 2}

Social & Environmental Consciousness



Solidarity

Eritrea's commitment to the Paris Agreement and NDC reflects growing environmental consciousness embedded in national development priorities.⁸



Participation



population

Volunteering

Eritrea-specific data not reported in the 2024 index.¹⁰

CAF World Giving Index
2024



th / 180 countries

Sustainability

Eritrea-specific EPI ranking not publicly available at time of publication.¹¹

Environmental
Performance Index
(EPI) 2024

