

Enabling Social Innovation in Burundi

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 Burundi's social innovation ecosystem.

Note: This snapshot is developed within the context of Burundi's post-conflict recovery environment, highly constrained governance space and significant development challenges, which shape the nature, actors and reach of social innovation.

 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 Burundian primary law. Innovation is referenced indirectly through national planning documents. The BTI 2024 notes that Burundi has developed new legislation and regulations in areas including fiscal rules, banking, the business ecosystem, and health — creating an improved enabling framework. ²

Government Body for Social Innovation

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- Ministry of Finance, Budget and Economic Development Planning: Coordinates national development planning and macroeconomic policy; central to resource allocation for social innovation programmes. ²
 - Ministry of Trade, Transport, Industry and Tourism: Supports MSME development, enterprise formalisation and private sector growth. ²
 - Ministry of Agriculture and Environment: Leads agricultural innovation; 90% of the population depends on agriculture, making this the primary social innovation sector. ²
 - Ministry of Social Affairs: Oversees social protection, community development and welfare programmes. ⁵
 - UNDP Burundi: Primary international partner supporting governance, enterprise and SDG programming. ⁵

Government Strategy for Social Innovation

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- National Development Plan (NDP) 2018-2027: Burundi's primary development framework; focuses on stability, agricultural productivity, social services and economic diversification. ²
 - Government Economic and Business Reforms (2022-2024): Following removal of US and EU sanctions, the government has introduced new legislation on fiscal rules, banking, business ecosystem and health; competition policy development began in 2022. ²
 - East African Community (EAC) and COMESA Integration: Burundi's membership in EAC and COMESA, and ratification of the African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement (AfCFTA), are creating new legal and market frameworks for innovation and enterprise. ²

Policies, Laws & Regulations

- Business Ecosystem Reform Legislation (2022-2024): New legislation improving business registration, competition policy and banking regulation, signalling a reform-minded environment. ²
- Investment Law: Governs business registration and foreign investment; recently updated as part of post-sanctions reform. ²
- NGO / CSO Regulatory Framework: Governs civil society organisations, which are primary vehicles for social innovation in the humanitarian and development sectors. ⁵

Official Statistics

127th/133 GII 2024 ranking — Burundi moved up the GII ranking in 2024, one of only 8 Sub-Saharan African economies to improve. Burundi and South Africa are GII innovation overperformers in 2024. ³

Overperformer Burundi is recognised as a GII 2024 innovation overperformer relative to its income level — a significant achievement for a low-income post-conflict economy. ⁴

90% of the population depends on agriculture; community-based agricultural innovation is the primary social innovation sector. ²

~400 people per square kilometre — one of Africa's highest population densities, creating acute pressure on land, food systems and livelihoods. ²

Government Programs

- Community-Based Agricultural Development: Ministry of Agriculture programmes promoting soil conservation, irrigation expansion and food security through smallholder agricultural innovation. ²
- Social Protection Programmes: National social protection framework including community-based safety nets, nutrition and health programmes. ⁵
- Business Environment Reform Initiatives: Government-initiated reforms to business registration, competition and banking, creating a more enabling environment for social enterprises. ²
- Refugees Return and Reintegration Programme: Addressing displacement through community-based integration and livelihood innovation. ⁵

ECOSYSTEM

Stakeholders

- UNDP Burundi: Supports governance reform, climate resilience, enterprise development and SDG programming. ⁵
- WFP Burundi: Leads food security, nutrition and climate-resilient livelihood innovation; a major social innovation actor in the humanitarian-development nexus. ⁵
- UNICEF Burundi: Focuses on child nutrition, education, WASH and social protection; key platform for community-led social innovation. ⁵
- University of Burundi (UB) and partner institutions: Provide limited but growing research and human capital capacity. ⁵
- Civil society organisations (CSOs) and faith-based organisations: Primary vehicles for grassroots social innovation, particularly in conflict-affected communities. ⁵

Support Initiatives

Support modalities are primarily UN-system and bilateral donor-led: UNDP governance and enterprise reform, WFP food systems and livelihood innovation, UNICEF child protection and education, and World Bank social protection investments. Regional integration through EAC and COMESA creates new platforms for enterprise and digital innovation support. ^{5,7}



Collaboration

The UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework provides the primary collaboration architecture for Burundi. Inter-agency coordination among UNDP, WFP, UNICEF, WHO and FAO governs social innovation programming. Government-civil society collaboration is constrained by the political environment, with BTI 2024 noting significant challenges to citizen participation and civil liberties. ^{5 6}

FINANCE



Financing Schemes

- Government budget: Social protection, agricultural development and public service delivery allocations. ²
 - UN agencies (UNDP, WFP, UNICEF, FAO): Humanitarian, food security, child protection and governance programming. ⁵
 - World Bank: Social protection systems, agricultural productivity and infrastructure investment. ⁷
 - AfDB, EU, bilateral donors: Infrastructure, economic reform and social protection financing. ⁷
- Sanctions removal (US and EU) has improved Burundi's access to international finance since 2022, creating new opportunities for concessional lending and grant financing. ²



Financing Inclusivity

Financing is targeted to vulnerable rural communities, women and children through UN and government social protection programmes. Access to formal enterprise financing for social innovators is very limited, reflecting the nascent nature of the financial system. Community-based savings groups and microfinance are the primary informal financial inclusion mechanisms. ^{2 5}

SOCIETY



Public Awareness of Social Innovation

Public awareness of social innovation as a formal concept is very limited. Community-level innovation is embedded in agricultural practices, mutual aid (umuganda-style community work) and religious community networks. The BTI 2024 notes that civic participation is constrained by the political environment, limiting formal social innovation discourse. ^{2 5}



Research

Research capacity is significantly constrained. The University of Burundi is the primary academic institution but is under-resourced. UN agency reporting and World Bank assessments provide the most systematic evidence base for social innovation programming. The BTI 2024 Country Report is the most comprehensive governance and development assessment. ^{2 7}



Education & Human Capital

Burundi has improved school enrolment rates, but quality and access remain significant challenges. Youth unemployment is high, creating urgency for skills development and enterprise training. UNDP and UN partners support vocational and digital skills programmes. Post-conflict human capital development is a priority across all development frameworks. ^{5 7}

Entrepreneurship



Enabling conditions for business



Innovation Capacity

GII 2024 — notable improvement; recognised as an innovation overperformer for its income level in 2024.^{3,4}

Global Innovation Index 2024



Social entrepreneurship prevalence

EAC & AfCFTA

Burundi's ratification of AfCFTA and EAC membership opens new market opportunities for social enterprises and entrepreneurs.²

Social & Environmental Consciousness



Burundi-specific data not separately reported in the 2024 index. Community solidarity and mutual aid are deeply embedded in Burundian culture.⁸

CAFWorld Giving Index 2024



Political participation



Volunteering



Sustainability

Environmental Performance Index (EPI) 2024: Burundi-specific EPI ranking not publicly available at time of publication. Burundi faces acute environmental challenges including land degradation, deforestation and soil erosion due to high population density and agricultural pressure.²

Environmental Performance Index (EPI) 2024