

Enabling Social Innovation in Cabo Verde

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 Cabo Verde'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



Cabo Verde has adopted a national Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) policy — one of only a handful of African countries to have done so, alongside Morocco, Senegal, Tunisia, Cameroon, Djibouti and Cabo Verde as noted by the World Economic Forum and AU SSE strategy documentation. This positions Cabo Verde as a regional leader in formal social innovation governance. ⁵

Government Body for Social Innovation



- Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Energy: Leads enterprise development, investment promotion and private sector growth; oversees Cabo Verde TradeInvest (CVTI) one-stop shop for investors. ⁴
- Cabo Verde Digital Programme: Government-backed digital transformation initiative; has trained and mentored over 200 youths and supported over 100 startups in digital innovation. ⁵
- Agency for Business and Innovation (ADEI): Supports enterprise development, MSME incubation and innovation ecosystem growth. ⁴
- Ministry of Finance and Business Development: Governs fiscal policy and SME support frameworks; reduced Corporate Income Tax from 21% to 20% for 2025. ⁴
- Cabo Verde TradeInvest (CVTI): One-stop investment promotion agency; approved USD 1.9 billion in projects and MoUs in 2024, with 15% industry-focused. ⁴

Government Strategy for Social Innovation



- Strategic Plan for Sustainable Development 2022-2026 (PEDS II): Government's medium-term development plan; aims to prepare Cabo Verde to achieve Ambition 2030 across Economy, Social, Sovereignty and Environment pillars. ²
- Ambition 2030: Long-term sustainable development vision; specifically includes innovation and resilience as core themes, and targets the Digital and Innovation Platform for 25% GDP contribution by 2030. ²
- National SSE Policy: Cabo Verde has adopted a formal national SSE policy, aligning with AU's 10-year SSE strategy adopted at the AU Presidential Summit in 2025. ⁵
- UN-facilitated SDG Programme (Joint SDG Fund): Government-led, UN-facilitated "Ambition 2030" plan reinforcing the National Planning System and creating enabling ecosystem for SDG financing. ³

Policies, Laws & Regulations

Directly or closely linked:

- National SSE Policy: Formal social and solidarity economy policy framework — a regional first. ⁵
- Technology Free Zones (ZLT) 2024: Established February 2024; promote tech-based innovation and new technology testing under national regulatory oversight. ⁴
- Integrated Tourism Development Zones (ZDTIs): Enable tourism-linked social innovation and sustainable development. ⁴

Broader enabling:

- Investment Law 2012: Applies to domestic and foreign investors; preserves freedom of investment and incentivises social enterprise. ⁴
- WTO Fisheries Subsidies Agreement (accepted Jan 2024): Demonstrates commitment to sustainable fisheries — a key social innovation sector. ⁴
- National Adaptation Plan 2022-2030: Climate adaptation framework driving community-based resilience and social innovation. ²

Official Statistics

90th/133 GII 2024 ranking — 4th in Sub-Saharan Africa; moved up from 91st in 2023; Cabo Verde ranks 1st globally in gross capital formation (GII 2024). ⁸

1st globally in gross capital formation per the GII 2024 — a standout indicator reflecting Cabo Verde's investment intensity. ⁸

7.3% Real GDP growth in 2024, fuelled by tourism surge (+16.5% tourist arrivals reaching 1.18 million) and first positive agricultural season in years. ⁴

1.0% Inflation in 2024 — lowest in recent history; poverty reduced to below pre-pandemic levels. ⁶

200+ youths trained and 100+ startups supported through Cabo Verde Digital Programme. ⁵

Government Programs

- Cabo Verde Digital Programme: Government digital transformation and incubation programme; trained 200+ youths, supported 100+ startups in ICT and digital economy. ⁵
- TechPark CV (African Development Bank, USD 38.7 million): Major AfDB-funded innovation hub in Praia (8 hectares near international airport) and Mindelo; includes Data Centre, Business Centre, Incubation Centre and Training Centre. ⁴
- Pro Empresa Programme: Government enterprise support programme providing business development services, training and market access for SMEs. ⁵
- SIMILI Project (UN SDG Fund): Circular economy innovation transforming discarded fishing nets into handcrafted fabrics for sale — a community-level social and environmental innovation. ⁷
- UN-Facilitated SDG Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF): Mobilises new financing flows by aligning budgeting, planning and investment into an enabling ecosystem. ³

ECOSYSTEM

Stakeholders

- TechPark CV: National innovation hub anchoring Cabo Verde's digital economy ambition; functional with 14 companies as of 2024. ⁴
- Cabo Verde Digital (government programme + ecosystem): Training, mentoring and incubation platform for youth innovators and startups. ⁵
- University of Cabo Verde (Uni-CV): Primary academic institution supporting research, human capital and enterprise education. ²
- UNDP Cabo Verde: SDG programming, innovation for development and inclusive finance support. ³
- FAO Cabo Verde: South-South Cooperation Programme on agricultural innovation; training farmers in soil management and organic fertiliser production. ⁷
- Diaspora Investor Space (IOM): Connects diaspora investors with local entrepreneurs to mobilise crucial funding for social innovation ventures. ⁷

Support Initiatives



Support modalities include government digital incubation (Cabo Verde Digital), TechPark CV infrastructure, SIMILI circular economy innovation, UN SDG Fund integrated finance programming, FAO agricultural innovation and IOM Diaspora Investor Space. Portugal-Cabo Verde bilateral debt conversion of USD 13 million into climate transition support (2023) is an innovative financing mechanism. ^{3 7}

Collaboration



Cabo Verde demonstrates strong multi-stakeholder collaboration, evidenced by the government-UN "Ambition 2030" co-creation process and TechPark CV's AfDB partnership. Regional collaboration through ECOWAS, the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (PALOP), and SIDS frameworks supports innovation governance. The UN Joint SDG Fund programme brings together UNCT agencies on integrated financing innovation. ^{3 5}

FINANCE

Financing Schemes



- AfDB (TechPark CV, USD 38.7 million): Digital innovation infrastructure investment. ⁴
- Joint SDG Fund: UN-facilitated integrated national financing framework for SDG innovation. ³
- FDI and private investment: USD 1.9 billion in approved projects/MoUs in 2024; tourism and industry focused. ⁴
- Portugal bilateral debt conversion (2023): USD 13 million of debt converted to climate transition support. ⁷
- Green Climate Fund (GCF): Climate resilience and sustainable tourism financing. ²

Financing Inclusivity



The IOM Diaspora Investor Space and Pro Empresa programme target inclusive enterprise development. Cabo Verde's high debt levels (110.2% of GDP in 2024) constrain domestic fiscal space. World Bank analysis indicates doubling down on women's economic empowerment could boost GDP growth by up to 12.2%. ^{6 7}

SOCIETY

Public Awareness of Social Innovation



Cabo Verde has among the highest public awareness of social innovation in West Africa, driven by the formal national SSE policy, government digital transformation narrative and global recognition as an innovation bright spot. The country's GII 2024 ranking of 90th — top 5 in Africa — and 1st place globally in gross capital formation drive positive innovation discourse. The SIMILI circular economy project and Cabo Verde Digital programme generate significant community-level awareness. ^{5 8}

Research



Research capacity is growing, led by Uni-CV and international partnerships. The African Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Index (AEEI) 2024 used Cabo Verde as a benchmarking case, drawing parallels with Mauritius. FAO South-South Cooperation programme provides agricultural innovation research support. Applied research is strongest in tourism, marine science, digital innovation and climate adaptation. ^{5 6}

Education & Human Capital



Cabo Verde Digital has trained 200+ youths, supporting digital skills for innovation. Uni-CV provides tertiary education with growing focus on digital economy and enterprise. The government is digitising 62% of public services by 2026 and 80% by 2030, creating a digital skills imperative. 79.2% of the population has a bank account — among the highest in West Africa — reflecting strong financial inclusion foundations for social enterprise. ^{4 5}

Entrepreneurship



Enabling conditions for business



Innovation Capacity

GII 2024 — 4th in Sub-Saharan Africa; 1st globally in gross capital formation; consolidating place in top 90. Cabo Verde is performing at expectations for its development level. ⁸

Global Innovation Index 2024



Social entrepreneurship prevalence

USD 1.9 billion in approved investment projects and MoUs in 2024; tourism (62%) and industry (15%) are leading sectors. ⁴

Social & Environmental Consciousness



Solidarity

:Cabo Verde-specific data not separately reported in the 2024 index. ²

CAFWorld Giving Index 2024



Political participation



Volunteering



Sustainability

Cabo Verde-specific EPI ranking not publicly available at time of publication. The National Adaptation Plan 2022-2030 and climate finance strategy reflect strong environmental consciousness, particularly given SIDS climate vulnerabilities. ¹⁰

Environmental Performance Index (EPI) 2024