

Enabling Social Innovation in Cook Islands



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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 Cook Islands’ 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



While no legal or official government definition of “social innovation” was identified, Cook Islands frames national development around *Turanga Memeitaki (Wellbeing)*, with commitments that encourage innovative approaches to social and environmental priorities. ²
Related policy language emphasises inclusion, access and capability-building through digital transformation, supporting enabling conditions for community and public service innovation. ⁴

Government Body for Social Innovation



Rather than a dedicated government body for social innovation, enabling functions are distributed across:

- **Office of the Prime Minister Cook Islands:** National development agenda documentation and indicator reporting (NSDA 2020+). ³
- **Ministry of Finance and Economic Management Cook Islands (MFEM):** Public finance, national budget publications and procurement policy. ^{11 7}
- **Business Trade and Investment Board (BTIB):** Small business support and loan products (relevant for mission-led ventures, even if not labelled “social innovation”). ¹⁸
- **Cook Islands Ministry of Justice** Registry frameworks enabling civil society and enterprise activity (e.g., incorporated societies, companies). ^{9 10}

Government Strategy for Social Innovation



While there is no standalone strategy for social innovation, relevant elements appear in core national strategies and planning frameworks

- **Te Ara Akapapa’anga Nui 2021–2121 (100-year vision) and Te Kaveinga Iti 2021–2026 (5-year scorecard)** set a wellbeing-led direction and monitoring approach that can support cross-sector solutions. ^{2 12}
- **Digital strategies (National Digital Strategy 2024–2030; National ICT Policy 2023–2027)** emphasise inclusion, access and capability as foundations for equitable innovation. ^{4 5}
- Youth development priorities are set out in the National Youth Policy 2021–2026. ⁶
- The UN Country Implementation Plan 2025–2027 reinforces alignment between national priorities and UN system programming across development themes relevant to social innovation (e.g., inclusion, resilience, service delivery). ¹⁶

Policies, Laws & Regulations

While no social innovation- or social enterprise-specific legislation was identified, relevant enabling frameworks include:

- **Incorporated Societies Act 1994** (as amended is the basis for establishing incorporated societies “not established for the purpose of pecuniary gain,” including registration and governance provisions).²
- **Companies Act 2017** supports incorporation and modern company governance; relevant for mission-led enterprises using company form (without a dedicated social enterprise category).¹⁰
- **Public procurement:** MFEM procurement policy provides the framework for government purchasing (a key lever for market access by innovative suppliers).⁷
- Procurement access point is the Cook Islands Government procurement portal.⁸

Business-environment reforms and regulatory strengthening are also discussed through regional development programming.¹⁷

Official Statistics

While official statistics specifically on social innovation, social enterprises, or the social and solidarity economy were not identified, Cook Islands produces regular statistics relevant to social and environmental priorities:

- Census of Population and Dwellings 2021 (baseline demographic and household characteristics).¹³
- Climate Change Survey Report 2023–2024 (public perceptions, awareness and behaviours related to climate change).¹⁴

In addition, incorporated societies and companies are registered through the justice registry system, supporting administrative visibility of organisational forms.²

Government Programs

Public programmes relevant to enabling social innovation are primarily framed through enterprise support, skills policy and digital transformation. Examples include:

- BTIB Loans: individual loan products of up to NZD 10,000 (eligibility rules published by BTIB).¹⁸
- Fees Free Initiative (ERP Phase II factsheet): fees-free courses delivered by local tertiary institutions, supporting workforce upskilling and participation in training.¹⁹
- National digital transformation strategy and policy frameworks supporting inclusive digital readiness and service delivery improvements.^{4 5}

ECOSYSTEM

Stakeholders

Cook Islands’ enabling environment includes a compact ecosystem where institutions often deliver multiple roles:

- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP): regional Accelerator Lab model (covering Cook Islands and neighbouring Pacific contexts), focused on identifying and scaling grassroots solutions.¹⁵
- Skills and training providers: Cook Islands Tertiary Training Institute (CITTI) as a central vocational/tertiary training institution.²⁰
- International education networks: UNESCO-UNEVOC listing for CITTI signals international TVET connectivity.²¹
- Asian Development Bank programming documents highlight business-environment reforms relevant to entrepreneurship and innovation.¹⁷

Support Initiatives

- Support initiatives are delivered through national institutions and regional programmes rather than dedicated social innovation incubators:
- UNDP Accelerator Lab approach (mapping solutions, learning, and scaling mechanisms).¹⁵
- Enterprise advisory and early-stage finance entry points through BTIB.¹⁸
- Skills development via CITTI and government fees-free support for selected courses.^{20 19}



Collaboration

Partnerships are visible through coordinated national planning and international cooperation:

- UN system programming aligned to national priorities through the Country Implementation Plan 2025–2027. ¹⁶
- Reform and enabling-environment collaboration via regional development programming (e.g., regulatory and investment climate reforms). ¹⁷

FINANCE



Financing Schemes

Social innovation-specific financing instruments were not identified; however, several mainstream and development-linked mechanisms can support social innovation in practice:

- BTIB Loans: up to NZD 10,000 for eligible applicants. ¹⁸
- MFEM budget publications provide the fiscal context for public investment and service delivery priorities (relevant for innovation in public services and community programmes). ¹¹
- UNDP Development Finance Assessment (commissioned by MFEM) provides an overview of the development finance landscape and financing pathways for national priorities. ²²



Financing Inclusivity

While no public evidence was identified of financing schemes explicitly targeted to inclusion groups (e.g., women, youth, remote communities) under a “social innovation” label, inclusion principles appear in enabling strategies:

- Digital strategy and ICT policy emphasise inclusive access and capability. ^{4 5}
- Fees-free training aims to widen access to learning opportunities. ¹⁹

SOCIETY



Public Awareness of Social Innovation

While public evidence of “social innovation” as a widely used term was not identified, Cook Islands has clear public-facing attention to issues that commonly drive social innovation, particularly climate and resilience. The national Climate Change Survey Report documents public perceptions, awareness and behaviours related to climate change. ¹⁴

National strategy language also promotes wellbeing-led outcomes and inclusive innovation-enabling conditions (including digital access). ^{2 4}



Research

Publicly available guidance on research principles links research practice to national wellbeing priorities and alignment with NSDA 2020+. ²³

Public evidence of dedicated domestic research centres focused specifically on “social innovation” was not identified in the sources used for this snapshot.



Education & Human Capital

While no dedicated degree programmes in “social innovation” were identified, education pathways support competencies commonly used in social innovation (skills, employability, entrepreneurship-relevant training):

- CITTI programme offerings across vocational and tertiary areas. ²⁰
- Government fees-free initiative supporting access to local tertiary courses (including CITTI). ¹⁹
- UNEVOC network connectivity for TVET learning and exchange. ²¹

Entrepreneurship

International benchmarking coverage for Cook Islands is limited in several global indices often used for cross-country comparison:



Business Environment

the World Bank WITS Cook Islands snapshot states that an Ease of Doing Business rank is not available. ²⁶



Innovation Capacity

Cook Islands does not appear among the economies listed on WIPO's GII 2025 economy briefs/profiles page. ²⁴



Social entrepreneurship

Cook Islands does not appear as an economy profile on GEM's public economy profiles page. ²⁵

Within this context, national enterprise support mechanisms (e.g., BTIB loans) provide practical entry points for local entrepreneurs and innovators.

Social & Environmental Consciousness

Environmental and climate priorities are visible in official statistics and public evidence:



Solidarity

Climate Change Survey Report provides evidence on climate awareness and behaviours.



Political participation



Volunteering



Sustainability

International comparability limitation: Cook Islands is listed among countries excluded from the 2024 Environmental Performance Index (EPI). ²⁷

Comparable international indicators on volunteerism, solidarity and political participation were not identified as Cook Islands-specific in the sources used for this snapshot.