

Enabling Social Innovation in South Sudan



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 South Sudan'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 formal legal definition of "social innovation" has been identified in South Sudan's primary law. The concept is emerging through UNDP Accelerator Lab programming, diaspora-linked enterprise and community-driven livelihood innovation. The Revised NDS 2021–2024 and Vision 2040 embed innovation indirectly through economic diversification, agricultural development and digital connectivity goals. ²

Government Body for Social Innovation ✓



- Ministry of Finance and Planning: Coordinates national development planning under R-NDS and Vision 2040. ²
- Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security: Leads agricultural innovation — the primary social innovation sector; over 80% of households depend on agriculture and animal husbandry. ⁷
- Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare: Oversees social protection, women's empowerment and community welfare programmes. ⁸
- Ministry of Environment and Forestry: Leads climate resilience programming with UNDP and UNEP support; implements the GEF-LDCF ecosystem adaptation project. ⁸
- University of Juba: Key academic partner; collaborates with UNDP on the UNIPOD Innovation Hub and climate resilience research. ^{3 8}

Government Strategy for Social Innovation ✓



- Revised National Development Strategy (R-NDS) 2021–2024: Primary development framework aligned with Vision 2040, Agenda 2030 and R-ARCSS; focuses on peace consolidation, economic stabilisation and sustainable development. ²
- South Sudan Rescue Plan 2023: Short-term economic stabilisation plan prioritising food security, basic services and economic diversification. ²
- National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA): Climate adaptation framework; basis for the USD 5 million GEF-LDCF ecosystem-based adaptation project 2023–2028. ^{7 8}

Policies, Laws & Regulations ✓ 🔗



- R-NDS 2021–2024: Overarching policy framework embedding enterprise development, digital connectivity and social equity. ²
- NGO / CSO Regulatory Framework: Governs civil society organisations — the primary vehicles for grassroots social innovation in the humanitarian and development context. ⁴
- GEF-LDCF Ecosystem Adaptation Project 2023–2028: Government-UNDP-UNEP programme for climate resilience; the largest ever ecosystem-based adaptation project in South Sudan. ⁸

Official Statistics

~80% of South Sudanese are multidimensionally poor (MPI 2024), creating urgent demand for community-based social innovation.²

7.1 million people face food insecurity in 2024; 2.5 million at risk of acute malnutrition — the primary driver of agricultural social innovation.²

6 UNDP-operated Innovation Hubs providing business development services, job placement, career counselling and entrepreneurship training.³

2,000+ businesses registered on South Sudan's first UNDP-launched digital marketplace to foster e-commerce and trade.³

Note: South Sudan is not included in the GII 2024 due to insufficient innovation data coverage.²

Government Programs

- Ecosystem-Based Adaptation Project 2023–2028 (GEF-LDCF): Largest ever ecosystem-based adaptation project in South Sudan; targets climate resilience in agro-pastoral landscapes; led by Ministry of Environment and Forestry with UNDP technical support.⁸
- UNDP Digital Marketplace: 2,000+ businesses registered; landmark social innovation in digital financial inclusion in a fragile context.³
- Solar Energy for Health Facilities: Solar systems installed in 10 health facilities in 2024; 18 more targeted in 2025 — community health innovation with UNDP support.³
- Cash Transfers for Women's Enterprise (World Bank): Interest-free loans and cash transfers supporting women to build businesses and create employment.⁵

ECOSYSTEM

Stakeholders

- UNDP South Sudan Accelerator Lab: Community-driven innovation and foresight; leads Sanduk-Sanduk savings scheme formalisation into SACCOs; convenes innovators through Meet and Greet events in Juba.⁴
- Scenius Hub / DefyHateNow: Youth-initiated hub in Juba providing physical space for South Sudanese to explore, build and grow social innovations.⁴
- University of Juba UNIPOD: UNDP-supported innovation hub connecting young innovators with enterprise and research resources.³
- UN Country Team (UNDP, WFP, UNICEF, FAO, WHO): Coordinate social innovation programming across food security, health, education, climate and displacement.^{3 8}
- South Sudanese Diaspora: A significant resource for skills, knowledge and remittances; internationally recognised in athletics and public service.⁴

Support Initiatives

Support modalities include UNDP Innovation Hubs (6 nationwide), community-based agricultural innovation, Sanduk-Sanduk savings scheme formalisation into SACCOs, World Bank cash transfers for women's enterprise, and GEF-LDCF climate adaptation programming.^{4 5 8}

Collaboration

Collaboration is primarily UN system-led through the UNDP Country Programme. The GEF-LDCF project brings together multiple ministries, University of Juba, communities, UNDP, UNEP and World Vision. The Sanduk-Sanduk initiative exemplifies cross-border collaboration between South Sudan and Sudan through the UNDP Africa Borderlands Centre.^{4 8}

Financing Schemes



- GEF-LDCF (USD 5 million): Ecosystem-based adaptation project financing.⁸
- World Bank IDA: Cash transfers, infrastructure and social protection financing.⁵
- UNDP, WFP, UNICEF, FAO: Humanitarian, food security and development programming.³
- Community Sanduk-Sanduk savings: Indigenous interest-free savings and loan mechanism enabling women's enterprise at community level.⁴

Financing Inclusivity



Financing is predominantly directed to the most vulnerable — women, displaced persons and food-insecure households. The Sanduk-Sanduk scheme is the most inclusive community-level financing mechanism. Formal enterprise financing for social innovators is extremely limited.^{4 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 traditional savings, agricultural adaptation and mutual aid. UNDP Accelerator Lab Meet and Greet events in Juba are building an emerging innovator community. The 2024 VNR explicitly acknowledges innovation and technology capacity needs.^{2 4}

Research



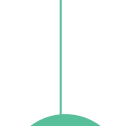
Research capacity is severely constrained by conflict and institutional fragility. The University of Juba and UNDP are the primary research actors. The 2024 MPI study is the most recent systematic evidence base for social innovation needs.^{2 8}

Education & Human Capital



Access to education remains severely limited. The UNDP UNIPOD at University of Juba is building innovation education capacity. Grassroots youth entrepreneurship — transforming aluminium cans into cooking pots in Wau and Kuajok — reflects resilient human capital for social innovation despite structural constraints.^{3 4}

Entrepreneurship



Business Environment

South Sudan's entrepreneurial ecosystem is nascent but resilient.



Innovation Capacity

The UNDP digital marketplace, 6 innovation hubs and UNIPOD form the backbone of formal enterprise support.



Social entrepreneurship prevalence

Community-level micro-enterprise and cooperative models — particularly in agriculture, fishing and small trade — are the primary entrepreneurship vehicles. Not included in GII 2024.^{3 9}

Social & Environmental Consciousness



Solidarity

South Sudan faces severe climate vulnerability — floods, droughts and heatwaves — making climate adaptation the most urgent social innovation priority.¹¹



Political participation



Volunteering

CAF World Giving Index 2024: South Sudan-specific data not reported in the 2024 index. Community solidarity and mutual aid are deeply embedded in South Sudanese culture.¹⁰



Sustainability

South Sudan-specific EPI ranking not publicly available at time of publication.

Environmental Performance Index (EPI) 2024

CAF World Giving Index 2024