

# Peer-learning Partnerships: Social Impact Measurement for the Social and Solidarity Economy and the Sustainable Development Goals



OECD  
Global Action

Promoting  
Social & Solidarity  
Economy Ecosystems



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## What did this partnership address?

The Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) has an important role to play in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

More and more SSE organisations measure the social impact they create, however the approaches applied vary greatly. The adoption of social impact measurement (SIM) in SSE practices linked to the SDGs, could increase the visibility of their activities and highlight the contribution of the SSE in addressing these global challenges. Till now, many SSE organisations were reluctant to adopt an SDG framework as seemingly complex and costly.

The objective of this partnership was to explore the vocabulary, frameworks and tools used by SSE organisations for social impact measurement and analyse how they could link to the SDGs.

### About Peer-learning Partnerships

Peer learning is an innovative and powerful approach to gather practitioners' insights, create communities of practice, and stimulate collective thinking.

As part of the OECD Global Action "Promoting Social and Solidarity Economy Ecosystems", funded by the European Union, six Peer-learning Partnerships have been set up to promote knowledge exchange and experience sharing on policies and practices for social and solidarity economy development.

## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



## What did we learn?

The SDG framework has set the basis for a common culture and, further, it contributes to partnership building among SSE organisations. Indeed, having a wide range of actors sharing a common vocabulary facilitates communication and can foster alliances among stakeholders. Investors, SSE organisations and policy makers have a role to play in every stage of the process.

### Resources and toolkits:

- [SEED SPOT](#)
- [SDG Compass](#)
- [Impact Management Project](#)
- [Agrément ESUS](#) (in French)

## Advantages of using the SDGs

**The SDGs offer a valuable common language for all stakeholders that can be shared in research and practice among investors, innovators and policy makers.** In fact, the SDGs are among the most frequently cited concepts in the field of impact measurement nowadays. Increased transparency and proactive communication can create trust and lay the foundations for cross-sector collaborations. Partners in the Consortium suggested to develop sector-specific catalogues of SDG indicators and curricular training modules to determine and describe how certain SDGs relate to SSE organisations. For example, [SEED SPOT](#), a social incubator, organized the 17 SDGs into five “SEED SPOT Impact Areas” that provide a simplified pathway for communicating the goals to stakeholders.

**The SDGs can help create shared measurement framework between investors and SSE actors because they can help standardise data.** The SDGs can facilitate communication with the investors by setting specific indicators and help align the interests and accountability of SSE organisations and the investors. In a context of limited resources for many SSE organisations, the SDGs can be a useful tool for satisfying internal learning needs and external accountability demands. A number of dedicated tools already exist. For example, the [SDG Compass](#) provides guidance for companies on how they can align their strategies as well as measure and manage their contribution to the realisation of the SDGs.

**Applying the SDG framework as the basis could help reduce the cost of SIM especially for investors.** The cost of the SIM process could be reduced by involving private and public investors but also by relying on common tools, methodological resources and lessons from past experiences. Good practices involve starting with a small set of standard indicators linked to the SDGs that can be easily reported by all the organisations. It is not easy for investees to implement the SDG framework because it is often unfamiliar to them and not their priority, so they really need to be supported by the investors.

## Drawbacks and trouble spots

**Due to the macro-level focus of the SDGs, it is often difficult to apply them at the micro or local levels of SSE organisations.** Social impact measurement must always be carried out considering the local context and locally available data. Consequently, the 17 SDGs with their 169 targets and 231 indicators developed for larger type organisations might not always be suitable for all SSE organisations and would require substantial adjustments. Gathering a library with the available recognized methodologies and tools for integrating SDGs with SIM could help SSE actors get inspired and apply SDG framework more often. The [Impact Management Project](#) is an example where a number of relevant tools could be found. The project provides a community of over 2 000

practitioners with a forum for building global consensus on measuring, assessing and reporting impact.

**There is the risk that generalised application of the SDGs as a framework for SIM could lead to impact washing and even for SSE organisations.** SSE organisations have confirmed their acquaintance with the SDG framework (90.7%) in a survey conducted by the Consortium. Even if the consultation stressed the positive outcome of using the SDGs for impact valorisation, the lack of regulation concerning social impact measurement presents the risk of green and social washing. This refers primarily to impact reports or communications that mention the SDGs, without showing transparently how an organization contributes to it. A good practice for policy makers might be using certifications to ensure the social focus of the organisation (as the "[Agrément ESUS](#)" in France).

#### **Case study: National Council to implement the SDGs, Mexico**

Mexico has been advancing the SDG 2030 Agenda and has established a National Strategy for Implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the first phase of the National Platform for Monitoring the SDGs. One of the concrete actions it has promoted was the National Council to implement the SDGs. The Council is working with a task force involving national policy makers as well as representatives of local governments, private sector, citizens and universities. The Mexican government has recognised the social economy as the perfect sector to promote the SDGs. Since social economy actors in Mexico are not properly acknowledged, using SDGs as a tool could help them to:

- facilitate dialogue among different stakeholders;
- better identify the actors that are already working in sustainable business;
- measure their impact.

Source: (French Impact, 2022), [Mexico National Council for 2030 Agenda](#)

### Case study - SEED Spot, the United States

SEED SPOT is an incubator that supports impact-driven, early-stage entrepreneurs who are building products, services and technologies that improve lives or communities. SEED SPOT began to incorporate the SDGs into its work in 2017 and now leverages them within its programmes, measurement and evaluation, fundraising and development, and strategic planning.

Upon implementation, SEED SPOT responded to three main challenges in the market:

- Unfamiliarity with the SDGs among stakeholders. The average entrepreneur, partner or mentor volunteer who SEED SPOT encountered had never heard of the SDGs, did not easily understand their purpose, and did not intrinsically find value in learning about them, identifying with them or discussing them.
- Complexity of the SDGs. The large quantity (17) and complexity of the SDGs, impaired the ability of novices to quickly understand and adopt them.
- Difference from known metrics. It is important to tie the SDGs to the existing standard data metrics that they have historically collected and reported.

SEED SPOT's response to the first two challenges of unfamiliarity and complexity was to dedicate a significant effort to the education of stakeholders about the SDGs – particularly ways that the SDGs could benefit them and their venture. In addition to the educational efforts, SEED SPOT organised the 17 goals into five “SEED SPOT Impact Areas” that provided a simplified pathway for communicating the goals to stakeholders. Stakeholders are first invited to identify and align with a broader, more familiar impact “category” before further specifying an associated SDG housed within the category or impact area.

For the third challenge – the metrics – SEED SPOT analysed the newly collected SDG data alongside economic performance data which includes jobs created, revenue generated and longevity in business, plus SEED SPOT's longitudinal impact data which includes the number of lives impacted per venture and their entrepreneurial self-efficacy scores (pre- and post-programme).

Source: (FrenchImpact, 2022), <https://seedspot.org/>

## Peer-learning approach

The peer learning was ensured through:

- **virtual knowledge exchange workshops** with SSE organisations, investors, and policy makers representing different geographies and stakeholder groups,
- **background research, identification of case studies and listing of relevant approaches,**
- **identification of best practices** from consortium members and experts from the SSE ecosystem,

### Outputs:

Peer-learning outcome report: [The SDGs: a common framework to promote Social Impact Measurement of the SSE](#)

Project webpage: <https://social-impact-measurement.le-frenchimpact.fr>

- **online public consultation among SSE actors** in the nine countries where consortia were present in order to get feedback from SSE actors over the concerns and suggestions on the topic. The survey gathered 145 responses from a variety of stakeholders.

This approach to peer learning allowed the Consortium to have discussions with all types of actors and resulted in improved understanding of the issues at stake for the SDGs and SIM.

## Peer-learning consortium

[French Impact](#) led a global consortium of 18 actors, from 8 different countries around the world (Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Mexico, Spain, United States), looking at how to use the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to progress on social impact measurement.

