



CIPRIANI COLLEGE
OF LABOUR AND CO-OPERATIVE STUDIES

WORK MATTERS COLUMN

January 2025

Caribbean World of Work Forum - Contributions of the Social and Solidarity Economy in the Caribbean

In their 2019 study “The contribution of the social and solidarity economy and social finance to the future of work” the International Labour Organization (ILO) observed the “world of work is nowadays characterized by changes beyond the direct control of workers and entrepreneurs but directly affecting them by modifying their positions and experiences”. These changes have compounded structural deficiencies in the Caribbean labour market. We have experienced the delocalization of activities that result in changes to traditional forms of employment contract and a widening distance between workers and the fruits of their labour, which in turn has led to feelings of remoteness and isolation as well as declining job satisfaction. Of course, this has inevitably led to the fragmentation and weakening of workers’ groups. Notably, unpredictable investment decisions have reduced job certainty. We continue to experience high levels of informality with workers in the informal sector being at a higher risk of having reduced social protections and exposed to precarious forms of employment. We have struggled to create an appropriately enabling environment within which entrepreneurship can thrive and have the expected positive impact on innovation in our economies. It is being argued that our economic landscape is plagued by stagnant or declining levels of productivity and a weak indigenous private sector; with the stark result being the stymied dynamism and resilience of the labour market.

This is the context for the upcoming Caribbean World of Work Forum (CWWF2025) during which the Cipriani College of Labour and Cooperative Studies (CCLCS) will use the opportunity to imagine and create the future of Caribbean work for Caribbean workers - based on the social and solidarity economy (SSE) model of production that aims to bring about social justice to address the regional realities of vulnerability and inequality. In essence for the last 4 or more centuries Caribbean economies, and indeed the lives of the majority of its inhabitants, have been organized to serve an external purpose. Even with decolonization,

the inherited model hasn’t worked – at least not for us. The sustainability of our future demands that we look to an alternative way of organizing our economies. We owe it to the generations to come.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) defines SSE as a concept that refers to “enterprises and organizations...which specifically produce goods, services and knowledge while pursuing economic and social aims and fostering solidarity”. The social and solidarity economy encompasses a variety of economic activities that put social objectives before profits. It includes traditional forms of cooperatives and mutual associations, social enterprises, and community-based organizations. The foregoing organizations taken together serve to create inclusive economies that foster the well-being of all members while promoting social cohesion, environmental sustainability, and local development. These very organizations have been the cornerstone of our Caribbean communities and societies – whether it is the credit unions providing financial services to those not served by traditional financial institutions, or community-based organisations providing pastoral care to our young people – they have all contributed to social cohesion. Not only is it time to recognize their roles, but we must imagine a future in which we create the much-needed enabling environment to maximise their impacts.

Within the context of the future of work the SSE therefore presents an alternative way of understanding the economy, putting people and the environment in the centre. It can be transformative because it values people and their needs, abilities and work above capital accumulation. It demands a more redistributive and equitable socio-economic model. SSE is an innovative economy that brings co-production of knowledge, goods, and social services on the basis of cooperation of different actors and sectors. It promotes social inclusion and social cohesion in a sustainable and continuous way.

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