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LOCAL SSE POLICIES ENABLING THE SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL TRANSITION

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WORKING PAPER

For an SSE that promotes a sustainable and enduring future in the Global South. The case of Haiti.

Charly Camilien VICTOR (Haiti)

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For an SSE that promotes a sustainable and enduring future in the Global South. The case of Haiti.[1]

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Introduction

When discussing sustainability in the context of the social and solidarity economy (SSE), it is necessary to question its compatibility with the predominant development approaches in local policies in Haiti. The perception of development varies according to socio-historical and political contexts. In some countries, it is seen as a tool of systemic domination or a colonial concept (Ortega and Pacheco, 2022). Development policies have long contributed to the socialization of inhabitants of the Global South through capitalism's individualistic system, which is presented as the only way out of poverty and unemployment.

Understanding these specificities is crucial for analyzing the direction of local SSE policies, considering prevailing political, economic and epistemological perspectives. At the same time, however, "several political innovations by oppressed groups in the anti-imperialist Global South have been possible because they arose from a plurality of knowledge and practices of resistance directly linked to the inhabitants' aspirations and needs" (Victor, 2025, p. 53, quoting Santos, 2016).

In fact, the "South" metaphor enables us to identify and understand which parts of humanity suffer most from the effects of colonial modernity and the expansion of capitalism (Mignolo, 2001). This expansion appears to have marginalized other types of knowledge and practices of solidarity rooted in the local territories of other societies that are in a constant state of transition. These societies were formerly described as pre-capitalist or underdeveloped, but are now referred to as "emerging countries.".

[1] Translated from French : VICTOR, C. C., « Pour une ESS au service d'un avenir soutenable et endurable dans le Sud global : Cas d'Haïti », *Politiques locales d'ESS au service de la transition socio-écologique*, GSEF, 2025.

It is important to consider how the SSE, as a new way of thinking about the economy and society, could help recover this knowledge and these practices, which Santos (2016) describes as absent. Is the emergence of a political and economic vision linked to the development paradigm synonymous with the transition envisaged in the field of the social and solidarity economy? The difficulty in answering this question partly explains the confusion that arises when discussing transition, depending on whether the perspective is from the Global North or South.

Indeed, the trap of conceptual franchising (*franchising conceptuel,* Santos, 2016)[2] shifts from one paradigm to another without necessarily altering the content of policies based on stigma and dichotomous hierarchies. Such policies either ignore or treat as absent the dynamics of collective self-organization that do not align with the models of life, thought and action promoted in international agendas (Victor, 2025c).

Growing recognition of the SSE does not guarantee the survival and renewal of these autonomous dynamics. In this regard, Charles Gide's dual interpretation of the social economy, adopted by Duverger (2023), highlights the importance of actors and researchers continuing to view the SSE as a "science of social justice." This could help avoid appropriation by political economy.

Consequently, the discourses of international institutions on the need to promote the social and solidarity economy in order to achieve development objectives must be questioned. Cooperatives have played a key role in shaping these discourses and policies, but have had very contrasting outcomes in certain countries, particularly Haiti. For instance, the American occupiers and the Duvalier dictatorship exploited cooperative structures against rural inhabitants (Victor, 2024b).

The first cooperatives to be promoted in Haiti were mainly agricultural, due to the boom in the Haitian economy at the end of the 19th century. This prosperity attracted the attention of European and North American agricultural companies, which invested their capital in the sector (Dossous, 2018). Compared to the cooperative system established by Haitian farmers themselves, these cooperatives were considered modern and focused mainly on cash crops.

In this contribution, I will first present my analytical approach, highlighting my research position. I will then provide a socio-historical context for the process of rural land allocation and solidarity practices that followed the neoliberal political offensive of the 1980s. An analysis of the limitations of local SSE public policies will reveal the paradoxes associated with the marginalization of socio-communal solidarity practices. This critical analysis will propose an interpretation of the social and solidarity economy from a Haitian perspective, questioning the authority of experts in the process. Finally, I invite readers to consider the SSE from a pluralistic epistemic approach.

[2] This refers to the general tendency to use hegemonic concepts without questioning or being aware of their inherent limitations, hiding behind adjectives in the process.

1. Analytical approach

My analytical approach is primarily inspired by the socioconstructivist approach to grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). This approach considers the various ways in which different interlocutors interpret and construct their own meanings or narratives.

Between 2021 and 2022, I conducted comprehensive, open-ended interviews in the form of conversations with approximately 60 actors (including residents, farmers, civil servants and stakeholders) across rural areas of Haiti's South Peninsula (Victor, 2024a)[3]. This method enabled me to gain significant insight into the socio-historical complexity of the quest for shared meaning and understanding, thereby ending conventional asymmetrical and hierarchical relationships (Valencia, 2016).

Cross-referencing historical materials in terms of traces of memory or lived experiences has enabled the tensions associated with different forms of interaction and power relations between various types of actors to be theorized and understood through in-depth analysis. As Cusicanqui (2010) demonstrated with reference to the Aymara and Quechua peasant struggles in Bolivia, certain actors can endure oppression for extended periods without being definitively vanquished.

To this effect, the historical-social interactionism approach (Shurman, 2001) has enabled me to move beyond the strict opposition between actors and agents. This has helped me to better understand the complex realities of oppression, while recognizing that domination is never absolute. This stance reveals denied knowledge and hidden realities that contradict modernist evolutionism (Santos, 2016). The latter contributes to the homogenization process and the destruction of all community ties. This process began within colonial empires before transforming into a hegemonic project under the ideology of progress and development throughout the Global South under capitalism.

Does this ideology facilitate the development of a solidarity epistemology (Connell, 2015) or *altersofía* (Ocaña and López, 2019)? In other words, does it encourage the effective consideration of others and their knowledge? In response, I propose social communalism as an alternative approach in the Global South, reconsidering the socio-historical realities of local solidarity practices. This approach also makes it possible to take into account resistance strategies aimed at sustainably preserving ways of life that have long been denied through local development policies. Thus, social communalism embraces "solidarity, cooperation, rolling mutual aid, distributive reciprocity, collective commitment, shared responsibility, conviviality, social inventiveness, self-organization, and others" (Victor, 2025a, p. 139).

The characteristic features of these sociocommunal forms of solidarity have long fostered various types of resistance to the oppressive and repressive systems that the Haitian state has estab-

[3] This article is based on the work carried out as part of my doctoral thesis defended on September 23, 2024.

lished. Researchers such as Casimir (2018) and Barthélémy (1989) have concluded that these rural territories are indeed sovereign entities with their own social, cultural, political, economic, religious and epistemic values.

2. Socio-historical context: neoliberal shock and rural areas in Haiti

As Lwijis (2009) points out, the US Caribbean Basin Initiative program of 1982, coupled with the establishment of subcontracting industries in the Haitian capital during the 1970s and 1980s (Lucien, 2016), led to the gradual adoption of discourses discouraging people from working the land. The Haitian government and other international aid institutions prioritized new cash crops[4] in these areas, to the detriment of small-scale mixed farming (Victor, 2025b). At the same time, rural dwellers flocked to subcontracting industries in Port-au-Prince.

In line with the economic policies proposed by major international organizations to the Haitian government, this subcontracting sector should address the problems of unemployment and poverty. At the same time, a series of factors have contributed to the gradual disintegration of rural areas as a result of agricultural liberalization policies, supposedly to exploit Haiti's comparative advantages (Lwijis, 2009).

Agricultural liberalization was a sudden change that took place during the decade from 1980 to 1990. This change transformed Haiti from a country with rationed and controlled demand for imported products to the most commercially liberalized country in the Americas (Fréguin and Devienne, 2006). These products were then exclusively controlled by a small group of traders who dominated the market for imported goods. At the same time, the exchange of local products for these imported goods became completely unbalanced. Rural farmers needed more money to buy them, while continuing to supply the big cities at rock-bottom prices.

According to the proponents of neoliberalism, faced with such dumping under the pretext of ensuring greater availability of food products within the country, the decline in local production was inevitable (Vil, 2017). This further contributed to continuous impoverishment. Accessibility to these products became an increasingly worrying problem.

Most farmers have been forced to abandon farming and have migrated either abroad or to large urban centers within the country, where they now work in other sectors; many have become small retailers of imported food products (Théodat, 2009). The insurance and mutual self-help system that these farmers had established in rural areas was no longer able to respond to the constraints imposed on them or cope with multiple events.

[4]"We will gradually but systematically remove 30% of the land currently dedicated to food production. Although this land is poor and is eroding rapidly, it yields low returns of corn, millet and root crops for consumption. In reality, they currently cultivate 400,000 hectares of land. We must dispossess them of this land, which they harvest for food each year, in order to encourage them to grow cash crops again." (Council for Inter-American Security. Caribbean Basin Initiative. Washington, 17 March 1982, cited by Lwijis, 2009, pp. 26–29, my translation).

Political and economic decisions resulting from the "neoliberal shock therapy" imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and structural adjustment programs (SAPs) (Steckley and Weis, 2017) have significantly contributed to the decapitalization of farmers. An example of this was the program of mass destruction or slaughter of "*kochon kreyòl*" (Creole pigs)[5]. From 1982 onwards, the United States of America recommended this destruction through its international development agency, USAID, under the pretext of "combating African swine fever and promoting American-style pig farming" (Smith, 2001, p. 29).

From the early 1990s onwards, amid growing calls for financial liberalization, a group of international non-governmental organizations, encouraged by the UN, embarked on a mission to distribute loans via credit mechanisms (Paul et al., 2012; Victor, 2023). These funds[6] were intended to "revitalize" the Haitian cooperative movement while promoting non-cooperative microfinance[7]. This situation resulted in investment and savings funds (CIP, by its French acronym) being established, many of which also called themselves "cooperatives".

The failure of these financial institutions led not only to the decapitalization and impoverishment of a number of Haitian families in rural areas, but also fueled mistrust of the cooperative movement (Victor, 2023). Paradoxically, in the face of the failure of these appeasement programs initiated by the international aid and solidarity system, these same institutions are presenting the social and solidarity economy as a solution, yet they are not changing their focus on poverty, unemployment and the informal sector through locally implemented policies.

3. The SSE at the limits of public policy and action in Haiti.

International public action resembles a new form of hegemonic regulation between the Global North and South. Through this new regulatory framework provided by the Institutions of the International Aid and Solidarity System (ISASI, by its French acronym), a subtle replacement of established forms of authority is taking place due to the weakening of the Haitian state. This situation is similar to the work of policy transfer studies, as presented by Delpeuch (2009), which analyses the effects of public policy transfer mechanisms and the international circulation of public action solutions.

To this end, there is no real dividing line between local public policy and international public action (Massardier, 2003) in a context where the role of the state is diminishing, as in Haiti. The

[5] These *kochon kreyòl* formed an important part of farmers' savings. Raising *kochon kreyòl* required minimal expense.

[6] This funding was allocated by the World Bank, USAID (United States Agency for International Development), and DID (Desjardins International Development).

[7] Unlike cooperative microfinance institutions, which are also known as savings and credit cooperatives or credit unions, non-cooperative microfinance institutions are microcredit and microfinance structures set up by the traditional banking system and other institutions specializing in microcredit, such as the Kole Zepòl Foundation (FONKOZE). These structures are generally promoted by non-governmental organizations and international financing agencies, such as the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), which has a project supporting savings and credit unions (Ministry of Economy and Finance, 2010).

Haitian state is becoming a mere intermediary between the numerous institutions involved in the transfer of public policy instruments, thereby undermining "the legitimacy of all the frameworks and modalities of public action in force in the receiving context" (Delpeuch, 2009, p. 164). In this context, international public action refers to:

> all development and "humanitarian permanence[8]" policies that replicate or transfer to certain countries in the South, particularly Haiti, intervention mechanisms linked to the promotion of decentralized governance policies that have become predominant with the imposition of structural adjustment programs (Victor, 2024b, p.186).

As part of these governance policy transfers, the promotion of new organizational forms under the pretext of establishing a civil society has allowed the principles of democratization, quota-based participation and formalization to prevail. At the same time, these mechanisms have facilitated the implementation of development projects by NGOs. The policies implemented during the Duvalier dictatorship, which were supported by the same institutions, are contradictory and paradoxical.

> Curiously, international aid became generous at the very moment when Duvalier was crushing civil society and exacerbating social exclusion. This was the very period during which the Haitian state came under US tutelage. Washington decided to implement a policy of "change within continuity" in Haiti, but then imposed "liberalization" and the tutelage of the regime in exchange for its support (Midy, 1991, p. 75).

However, it is important to consider the context in which these institutions of the International Aid and Solidarity System became predominant, namely the transition from the welfare state to the neoliberal state. This transition has primarily manifested itself in the transformation of vulnerable people into mere consumers, serving to discipline them according to neoliberal paternalistic logic as a "system of poverty governance" (Soss et al., 2011, p. 3). This form of paternalism contributes to the invisibility of real needs at the local level, affecting the motivation of social actors to question or remind the state of its historical mission to recognize social rights (Garrow and Hasenfeld, 2012).

This situation contributes to the depoliticization of endogenous social movements in favor of a globalized civil society, with NGOs and international humanitarian or development associations serving the neoliberal regime. These NGOs "pursue social policies and protect developmentalist ideologies." These activities enable them to influence people experiencing social problems, […] they can be considered a form of government, directly linked to the international community but acting locally (Lwijis, 2009, pp. 9 and 38).

[8] This refers to the fact that humanitarian actors remain in a territory, often transforming themselves into development agents after the event that justified their intervention.

This political change transfers certain responsibilities formerly entrusted to the state to these institutions. In the United States of America, this transformation took place through local associative structures known as "nonprofit community-based organizations (CBOs)", which provide political support services to individuals in need in their neighborhoods. Marvell (2004) refers to this as the "privatization of the welfare state."

The US international development policy in Haiti, implemented through USAID, promoted this model via CBOs (Smucker, 1983; Smith, 2001). According to Smucker (1983), these project structures were intended to offer an alternative to revolutionary movements seeking social transformation, which mainly existed in countries such as Haiti.

Subsequently, Haiti became an "NGO republic" (Salignon, 2012) or a "*projectorat*" (Lombart et al., 2014) due to the subordination of the state. Carmona (2008) explains that international cooperation can reduce certain countries to aid laboratories and subsidiary democracies, or "*projectorats*". The latter are "countries that are governed under the tutelage of other donor countries and in accordance with a poverty reduction strategy paper and the revenues of international financial institutions. They lack the autonomy to implement their own policies [...]" (Carmona, 2008, p. 19, my translation).

Carmona also views NGOs as semi-state entities with an ambiguous role that are part of the complex web of good governance, economic adjustment processes, and poverty reduction programs. Johnston (2024), on the other hand, prefers to talk about the "Aid State", that is, a State which is subject to the hegemonic control of foreign institutions that has distanced itself from the specific needs, demands and interests of its people. How can we still talk about local SSE policies through this framework, where NGOs and associations from the Global North and South play a leading role?

These aid operators actively contribute to ignorance about rural areas, where local partners or subcontractors also operate (Olivier, 2018). Most of these actors pay little attention to the many endogenous practices of solidarity that have long enabled these rural communities to resist and determine their own destiny. In this sense, SSE as an alternative to development would consist of a new way of considering the economy and society together, based on pluralistic epistemic policies and practices. This is in contrast to the approach proposed in the Strategic Plan for the Development of Haiti.

3.1. Strategic Plan for the Development of Haiti (PSDH), SDGs and SSE

The Strategic Plan for Haiti's Development (PSDH) aims to establish Haiti as an emerging country by 2030. In terms of the SSE policies contained in the PSDH (2012), the SSE is mainly considered for formalizing the informal sector, with the aim of eradicating poverty (SDG #1) and reducing unemployment (SDG #8). Does this approach reflect a noble or reductive vision of the SSE on the part of the Haitian government and its international partners?

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), not entirely detached from the universalist economic interpretation of hegemonic capitalism, seem imperfectly suited to certain socio-historical contexts. In fact, the development policies pursued to date in in Haiti to date have been unsuccessful, reducing territories to mere receptacles for projects. Is the addition of the term "sustainable" enough to hope for different results?

Despite repeated failures, these development planning policies seem to be continuing, in other forms, the prerogatives of structural adjustment programs within the framework of the new economic order that emerged following the 1975 crisis. According to Lwijis (2009), this situation has led to the proliferation of Institutions of the International Aid and Solidarity System, particularly non-governmental organizations (NGOs) at the national and international levels, whose objective is to control or appropriate socio-political movements demanding change in impoverished countries.

In this sense, the Canadian NGO Development and Peace[9],views the SSE as a means of compensating for the reduction in international aid to Haiti through its SSE program. Presented as an alternative to official development assistance and not to development itself, the SSE is entrusted with the task of ensuring "the transition from the popular economy to the market economy" (Lachapelle, 2015). To this end, nearly $3 million has been mobilized for social enterprises aiming for a certain level of profitability in order to ensure financial autonomy, a goal which seems somewhat contradictory given how the SSE is viewed.

Likewise, the paradox remains that this NGO focuses on so-called formal or formalizing structures, which are mostly created for the purposes of receiving this aid, on which their survival depends. The evaluation criteria applied by the Institutions of the International Aid and Solidarity System are often ill-suited to the realities and organizational methods of local structures that aim to meet social needs and preserve the commons as a whole. This approach contributes to a lack of understanding of socio-historical forms of solidarity in which social relations of solidarity take precedence over the economic dimension of their activities.

In fact, most studies conducted on rural areas in Haiti have long focused on apprehension about poverty, resistance to change and the myth of primitivism. These studies and writings perpetuate a Western-centric economic view of formerly colonized societies, reflecting the stigma towards these countries as being underdeveloped at the time. These stigmas continue to shape descriptions of social, economic, political and religious life in these rural areas.

Among these studies, Métraux (1951) associated the desire for cooperation among Haitian peasants with their situation of poverty. Referring to solidarity practices among peasants, Leyburn (1998) argued that Haitian society would never be able to integrate into a viable capitalist democratic system, as if this were the goal of every society. Lundahl (2015), on the other hand, refers to a primitive or underdeveloped economy, given the lack of boundaries between work, social activities and leisure. He goes on to discuss the need for external

[9] https://www.socioeco.org/bdf_fiche-video-270_en.html

intervention or assistance programs. All these studies, conducted in the name of development, sought to stifle the values and principles currently defended by the SSE.

Interpreting the peasant economy according to prevailing formalities aligns with a perspective that fails to recognize the socio-economic resistance strategies employed against the commodity plantation system in favor of market capitalism. This explains the use of derogatory terms such as "pre-capitalist", "traditional economy" and "underdeveloped" to describe the rural sector. Therefore, it is important to deconstruct these discourses in order to propose an alternative narrative concerning the forms and practices of socio-communal solidarity to develop endogenous and sustainable SSE policies. How can objectives that are not rooted in the experiences and social realities of the relevant territories be truly sustainable?

As envisaged in the Strategic Plan for the Development of Haiti, inspired by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), now transformed into Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), public actors and national and international experts seem view the SSE as a palliative measure rather than an alternative approach to thinking about the economy and society. Their approaches do not stray far from conceptual categories based on the stigmas associated with promoting the capitalist system through development programs and projects.

This has led to the neglect of deep-rooted socio-economic structures in favor of models that are often considered or proposed as being universally applicable, but which are frequently abstract. These models suggest, above all, a continuous process of impoverishment and loss of sovereignty in Haiti, the "country of projects" (Trouillot, 1990). The capitalist system has imposed itself as the only perspective by destroying various socio-communal ties since the US occupation of Haiti (1915–1934), while promoting so-called community development.

3.2. The SSE as a social enterprise in Haiti?

The arrival of these cooperative or community store projects, which were primarily financial in nature, caused a major disruption to endogenous solidarity structures by creating dissension within them. These community stores mainly sold imported food products. A select group of individuals were almost exclusively involved in managing these businesses, while other members of beneficiary structures lost control. This was the case with the management of the "*Bon Zensen*" community store, which was entrusted to a peasant structure in 2009. The objectives pursued in community store projects financed by the World Bank are not too different from the promises surrounding social enterprises proposed today in the name of SSE.

Prior to the community store project, the *Bon Zenzenn* association operated based on consultation between members. Members had control over the association's leaders when deciding on collective projects together. However, with the community store, the economic and financial management principles, which not everyone fully understood, became a source of power for those who were literate in French. The other members of *Bon Zenzenn*, who were mainly Creole speakers, no longer had any real control. This small store management committee made all

decisions for its own benefit without consultation, leading to the disengagement of the other association members.

Rather than continuing to engage concerned members in activities centered on the principles of living together, shared commons and solidarity, the focus of attention had become this community project. These principles are inspired by historical forms of association, such as *Eskwad, Konbit* and *Sosyete*. As one of the people responsible for *Bon Zenzenn* points out:

> I finally realize that perhaps living together would still be the norm if this project did not exist. The committee wanted to make a profit, but it was not possible to give products to the committee members every month as this is a community project (Anse-à-Veau, 27/08/2022).

This has led to conflicts of interest over money, a problem faced by most beneficiary organizations in rural areas of the Southern Peninsula. Often, this type of mismanagement is also influenced by project leaders. The latter often raise doubts about the funds actually allocated, given the constraints associated with their limited duration. Such constraints distance beneficiary associations from viable socio-communal practices in rural areas, which constitute a Haitian perspective on SSE.

4. Haitian perspectives on the SSE and challenges of the informal sector

Socio-communal solidarity practices (SSPs) form part of specific territorial and organizational dynamics that influence their structure according to the specific conditions of the environment. From a historical perspective, these practices are particularly linked to the agrarian system. This observation is consistent with Élie's (2015) comments on the social and solidarity economy in Haiti, which he associates with the way agricultural production is organized.

The configurations of the agrarian system have given rise to management and operating methods that are specific to territories in which associative activities based on cooperation, mutualization or, better yet, solidarity in reciprocity are developing (Victor, 2024b). These activities form the basis of socio-communal solidarity practices. Depending on the systems of influence and the relationships developed between them, these practices have taken different forms in different territories.

The best-known examples of these structures are the *Konbit*, *Eskwad*, *Atribisyon* and *Sosye*, whose activities consist of solidarity-based, reciprocal exchanges to develop agricultural land. These practices essentially involve pooling resources to address the various problems and needs of rural areas. Socio-communal solidarity practices are based on territorial proximity and embody territorial collectivism, where mutual aid and sharing are part of social, economic and cultural dynamics (Victor, 2025d). These forms of solidarity are based on a reciprocity inte-

grated into the functioning of communities, where collective authority is democratized through the shared management of resources and local power (Quijano, 2001).

At the same time, associations that have recently emerged in urban and peri-urban areas tend to operate according to an external logic. They are usually formed as a result of humanitarian or development projects led by Institutions of the International Aid and Solidarity System. These associations often respond to needs identified from outside according to the criteria and requirements of donors, who define how they function, who is in their composition and how frequently they hold activities. Consequently, these new antagonistic structures affect local social cohesion and the principles of mutual cooperation that are characteristic of socio-communal forms of solidarity in rural areas. They also tend to transform these areas in the service of exogenous projects.

4.1. Towards a local political approach to the social and solidarity economy in Haiti

The proliferation, or rather, the spread of various forms of associations acting as courtiers in the context of aid policies is transforming territories into veritable battlegrounds for privileges linked to "development rents" (Olivier de Sardan, 1995) and humanitarian aid. This transformation is taking place without any concern for the real social utility of initiatives that are promoted according to external standards and principles. These regulatory approaches often give rise to a logic of categorization and instrumentalization of the socio-historical models of self-organization of collective productive forces.

To this effect, developing a local political vision of the SSE in Haiti involves questioning the dynamics introduced by international institutions. Often framed by conceptions far removed from local realities, these dynamics reinforce disparaging judgements about endogenous practices of solidarity, risking an increase in inequalities and the perpetuation of stigmas at the expense of social utility that is truly contextual.

The projects promoted by these institutions tend to distort local association networks, marginalizing those who do not directly benefit from the aid. Short-term projects cannot therefore sustainably embrace the objectives promoted by endogenous practices and social movements. It is therefore essential to continue deconstructing these stigmas and hierarchies (formal/informal, traditional/modern, etc.).

These shortcomings prevent the in-depth questioning of the institutional and legal forms imported to build states against their societies in certain formerly colonized countries that now align with neoliberal policies. For example, it would be interesting to ask why an economy or society is considered to be 70 or 80 per cent informal. The same question applies to unemployment, given that socio-communal solidarity practices have always involved a significant proportion of local farmers and agricultural workers.

At the same time, intermediary structures such as credit unions, non-cooperative microfinance institutions and banks offering microloans have taken on the role of financing these informal activities, appropriating the fruits of this unpaid labor in the process. However, paid labor accounts for only a small proportion of global labor activities (Quijano, 2014). Consequently, it is by no means the only model that can be envisaged for sustaining human life.

According to Hart (2006), the interest of certain international organizations in the informal sector, or the so-called popular economy, primarily reflects their concerns, particularly with regard to Bretton Woods institutions. The latter feared possible social unrest following the various political and economic measures imposed through programs such as the SAP[10], which led to the profound dislocation of certain societies.

These international organizations are now keen to pay more attention to farmers and the urban poor, who have been severely affected by these measures. In this sense, the "informal" category should be analyzed in terms of the ideological and political choices that are limited to the ripple effects of the globalized economic system and its consequences for people's lifestyles in certain countries.

In the Haitian context, the current trend is to categorize well-established historical practices as belonging to the informal or traditional sector. This classification is encouraged by certain development actors who prefer to work with formal or modern associations.

Consequently, the term "informal" reflects the historical negation of social forms that nevertheless persist, grow stronger and regenerate by incorporating different dimensions, depending on the dynamics at play in the territories. According to Sibley and Liu (2012), this historical negation is akin to a prescriptive logic, or even a myth, used to deny the historical injustices experienced by certain social groups in formerly colonized areas - as if these injustices were insignificant or irrelevant to contemporary society.

The totalizing and ahistorical discourse that accompanies the phenomenon of informality affects practically everything. Anything that does not fit into the control system of the "Market State" (Robison, 2006), which is linked to the hegemonic project of neoliberalism, is classified as informal, including sectors that are continuously maintained by farmers. Resistance to this approach is associated with this merchant category.

As a merchant category, the informal sector also tends to replace the other assertive notion of dualistic rationality, namely "the traditional" (Escobar, 2018). The "formal/informal" dichotomy is therefore ideologically charged and primarily driven by development policies or the political economy of development.

Therefore, it is crucial to move away from legal systems inherited from the colonial era. As Wolkmer (2012) points out, the modern legal culture of some countries is based on a colonial extractivist economic past and the subsequent construction of an elitist, individualistic and for-

[10] Structural Adjustment Program (SAP)

malistic sociopolitical system. This legal system serves to delegitimize anything that escapes the global capitalist conception of social control through labor, resources, and products. Thus, self-constituted associative structures operating outside the dominant rules are swiftly deprecated and pejoratively labelled.

Pita (2016), who studied solidarity structures in Brazil, argues that the logic underlying discussions about group informality, based on notions such as contracts and individual subjective rights, stems from a legal tradition foreign to the history, experiences and reality of most of the population. This legal tradition, imposed during the colonial period, continues to influence our contemporary reality and reproduce inequalities, even under the guise of the democratization process led by experts.

4.2. Experts for which SSE in Haiti?

The growing recognition of the SSE by international development and humanitarian institutions poses significant challenges for certain countries in the Global South that have long suffered from the excessive power of experts. The risk of co-optation by these experts exposes the SSE field to participatory social engineering promoted in the form of restrictive or even alienating toolkits.

Expertocracy is generally based on normative frameworks that tend to reproduce the stigmas inherent in the dynamics of domination, thereby reinforcing inequalities. The outsourced approach involving the intervention of experts tends to overlook the cultural, social and historical specifics of the territories concerned. The Haitian context is a perfect example of this.

Ferdinand (2024) describes this alienation as the subordination of lived experience to expert knowledge, exacerbated by states and international institutions' use of these predominantly Western-centered "intellectual" productions. This process also limits recognition of local knowledge, marginalizing endogenous forms of solidarity and social organization.

In this sense, it would be wise for the SSE field to move away from any form of generalist epistemology that perpetuates global cognitive injustice. This would pave the way for an ecology of knowledge that promotes the alternative "means of knowing that emerged during the struggle against capitalism and colonialism" (Santos, 2016, p. 347). The epistemologies of the South enable us to "discover alternative practices outside the productivist matrix and market growth" (Laville, 2020), to which the SSE could contribute as an "alternative paradigm" (Victor, 2025c).

Consequently, it is crucial to restore visibility to, and legitimize, socio-communal solidarity practices in Haiti. These practices embody a genuine SSE rooted in the local realities of Haiti's rural areas. As Santos (2016) proposes in his sociology of absences, these practices must be recognized and valued by being fully integrated into the design of an SSE that respects territorial dynamics.

5. The SSE at the service of the commons, social and economic justice.

In order to prevent technocratic thinking from hijacking the SSE, it is crucial to recognize and integrate local experiential knowledge and practices originating in the territories themselves. This knowledge, which is often overlooked, is vital for designing an SSE that fully embraces the principles of reciprocity and communality, revealing and promoting endogenous dynamics of solidarity through local policies.

As Richez-Battesti (2010) points out, principles and solutions must be generated by the local actors themselves and be based on locally expressed needs rather than being imposed by external experts. SSE structures, as movements serving the commons, remain collective spaces for the production, management and sharing of resources according to the needs of local communities.

From the perspective of the Global South, the SSE must address specific socio-historical issues if it is to reflect the multidimensional realities of the territories concerned, particularly in contexts such as Haiti. Moving beyond traditional dichotomies (e.g. modern/traditional, formal/informal) remains fundamental. The SSE therefore needs to reposition itself as a science of social justice, placing the principles of redistribution and social and economic equity at the heart of its work, as Charles Gide (as quoted by Duverger, 2023) proposed.

This repositioning requires us to move beyond institutionalized forms that have been validated by expert groups and align with the aspirations of stakeholders. Consequently, the social and solidarity economy sector must reconsider certain developmentalist and economic concepts. These dualistic conceptions, which are somewhat market-oriented, prevent the endogenous dynamics of solidarity, which have been silenced, from being taken into account.

While it is possible to speak of the failure of development in Haiti in the sense understood by Escobar (2018), it is important to consider the concepts derived from this theory with caution. They contribute to the peripheralisation or “informalization” of lifestyles and organizations based on sustainable forms of solidarity, which serve as resistance and alternatives to the dominant system.

Conclusion: Towards a pluralistic SSE anchored in endogenous knowledge.

As an alternative paradigm, the social and solidarity economy has a role to play in knowledge production based on principles of reciprocity and communality in the Global South. This could help highlight specific issues, given the position of certain countries in the Global South within the political, economic and epistemological landscape.

Stakeholders and researchers in the field of SSE are interested in proposing open analytical frameworks that can capture the complexity of social realities. These tools should "allow us to go beyond the dualistic and otherizing analyses of the past" (Escobar, 2018) in order to understand the world in all its sociohistorical complexity.

By freeing itself from dualistic and externalized approaches, the SSE could become a vector of social and economic transformation that is truly adapted to local contexts and takes into account local conceptions of change. To achieve this, the plans and projects formulated in the Strategic Plan for the Development of Haiti arising from political economy paradigms must be revised. In terms of public policy, the plan merely seeks to "territorialize the provision of services and formalize the informal sector through credit mechanisms with the help of the social and solidarity economy" (Victor, 2023).

The field of SSE provides an opportunity to recognize alternative societal projects that have long been repressed or rendered invisible. Adopting the perspective of socio-communal forms of solidarity (FSS, by its French acronym) therefore involves aligning with the sovereign logic of Haitian rural territories and their diverse socio-economic activities, which are rooted in the local community. Moving beyond ignorance and dependence necessitates rejecting the one-sided vision of societies doubly victimized by the hegemonic system. Under the pretext of remedying past injustices, this system only serves to reinforce them.

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ABOUT THE PUBLICATION

Founded in 2013 in Seoul, the GSEF – Global Forum for Social and Solidarity Economy – is a global organization of local governments and civil society actors committed to promoting and developing the social and solidarity economy. Its 90 members, present in 35 countries, represent the diversity of SSE stakeholders: local governments, networks of actors, associations, cooperatives, mutual societies, foundations, social enterprises, universities, etc. The GSEF supports the development of the SSE around the world by promoting dialogue between public authorities and SSE actors in order to jointly develop local public policies that contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the emergence of ecosystems conducive to the SSE.

The GSEF thematic working groups (WGs) were voted on at the General Assembly on May 5, 2023. The WG on "The Impact of SSE Public Policies on the Achievement of the SDGs" brings together some fifteen researchers from all continents. It is led by Marguerite Mendell (Karl Polanyi Institute) and Timothée Duverger (Chair Terr'ESS, Sciences Po Bordeaux) and supported by the GSEF General Secretariat employee working on his CIFRE thesis.

Following on from research already conducted by the GSEF in partnership with UNRISD, which led to the production of guidelines for local SSE policies, in January 2024 the Research WG launched a call for contributions to gather proposals for working papers focusing on three recurring processes in public action: development, implementation, and evaluation. Through the analysis of these processes of SSE public policy development, the authors of the papers (both researchers and SSE actors) were asked to examine two fundamental dimensions: the contribution of these local policies to the achievement of sustainable development goals, and the paradoxes associated with the institutionalization of the SSE.

A reading committee composed of GT members evaluated more than forty proposals, including the seventeen working papers now published under the title *Local SSE Policies enabling the Socio-Ecological Transition*. Each paper is available on the GSEF website, free of charge, in its original language (English, French, or Spanish) and in English. This publication and the English translations were made possible thanks to financial support from Caisse des Dépôts.

The concrete examples provided by these working papers will feed into programs to strengthen the capacities of local authorities and support the development of public policies favorable to the SSE.

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