

Brief Introduction to Taiwan Social Innovation Policies



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1. Introduction

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)^[1] set forth by the United Nations in 2000 are carried out primarily by nations and international organizations. Subsequently, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set forth by the United Nations in 2015 started to delegate the functions to organizations of all levels. Presently, there is a global awareness of the importance of balancing “economic growth”, “social progress”, and “environmental protection” simultaneously during development. In the above context, many similar concepts have arisen worldwide, including social/solidarity economy, social entrepreneurship and social enterprise, and social innovation.

Generally, social innovation aims to alter the interactions between various groups in society through innovative applications of technology or business models, and to find new ways to solve social problems through such alterations. In other words, the goal is to use innovative methods to solve social problems. The difference between social innovation and social enterprise is that social enterprise combines commercial power to achieve its social mission under a specific perspective, while social innovation creates social value through cooperation with and coordination among technology, resources, and communities under a diversified nature.

2. Overview of Taiwan Social Enterprise Policy

To integrate into the global community and assist in the development of domestic social innovation, Taiwan’s Executive Yuan launched the “Social Enterprise Action Plan” in 2014, which is the first policy initiative to support social enterprises (from 2014 to 2016). Under this policy initiative, through consulting with various ministries and applying methods such as “amending regulations”, “building platforms”, and “raising funds”, the initiative set to create an environment with favorable conditions for social innovation and start-ups. At this stage, the initiative was adopted under the principle of “administrative guidance before legislation” in order to encourage private enterprise development without excessive burden, and avoid regulations restricting the development of social enterprises, such as excessive definition of social enterprises. Moreover, for preserving the original types of these enterprises, this Action Plan did not limit the types of social enterprises to companies, non-profit organizations, or other specific types of organizations.

To sustain the purpose of the Social Enterprise Action Plan and to echo and reflect the 17 sustainable development goals proposed in SDGs by the United Nations, the Executive Yuan launched the “Social Innovation Action Plan” (effective from 2018 to 2022) in 2018 to establish a friendly development environment for social innovation and to develop diversified social innovation models through the concept of “openness, gathering, practicality, and sustainability”. In this Action Plan, “social innovation” referred to “social innovation organizations” that solve social problems through technology or innovative business models. The balancing of the three managerial goals of society, environment value, and profitability is the best demonstration of the concept of social innovation.

3. Government’s Relevant Social Enterprise Policy and Resources

The ministries of the Taiwan Government have been promoting relevant policies in accordance with the Social Innovation Action Plan issued by the Executive Yuan in 2018, such as the “Registration System for Social Innovation Enterprises” (counseling of social enterprises), the “Buying Power - Social Innovation Products and Services Procurement”, the “Social Innovation Platform” established by the Ministry of Economic Affairs, the “Social Innovation Manager Training Courses”, the “Promoting Social Innovation and Employment Opportunities” administered by the Ministry of Labor, and the “University Social Responsibility Program” published by the Ministry of Education. Among the above policies stands out the measures adopted by the Ministry of Economic Affairs, and a brief introduction of those policies are as follows:

i. Social Innovation Platform

To connect all resources involved in social issues to promote social innovation development in Taiwan, the Ministry of Economic Affairs established the “Social Innovation Platform”.^[2] With visibility through the Social Innovation Platform, it has become more efficient to search for targets in a public and transparent way and to assist with the input of resources originally belonging to different fields in order to expand social influence.

As a digital platform gathering “social innovation issues in Taiwan,” the Social Innovation Platform covers multiple and complete social innovation resources, which include the “SDGs Map” constructed on the Social Innovation Platform, by which we can better understand how county and city governments in Taiwan implement SDGs and Voluntary Local Review Reports, and which allow us to search the Social Innovation Database^[3] and the registered organizations, by which citizens, enterprises, organizations, and even local governments concerned with local development can find their partners expediently as possible, establish service lines to proactively assist public or private entities with their needs/resources, and continue to enable the regional revitalization organizations, ministries, and enterprises to identify and put forward their needs for social innovation through the function of “Social Innovation Proposals”, which assist social innovation organizations with visibility while advancing cooperation and expanding social influence.

In addition, the “Event Page” was established on the Social Innovation Platform and offers functions, such as the publishing, searching, and sorting of events in four major dimensions with respect to social innovation organization, governments, enterprises, and citizens; and encourages citizens, social innovation organizations, enterprises, and governments to devote themselves via open participation to continuously expand the influence of the (Civic Technology) Social Innovation Platform. The “Corporate Social Responsibility Report” collects the corporate social responsibility reports, observes the distribution of resources for sustainable development by corporations in Taiwan, offers filtering functions by regions, keyword, popular rankings, and or SDGs types, and provides contact information and a download function for previous years’ reports, in order to effectively assist social innovation organizations to obtain a more precise understanding of the status quo, needs, and trends with respect to their development of respective products and services.

Figure 1: SDGs Map

Reference: Social Innovation Platform (<https://si.taiwan.gov.tw/>)

Figure 2: Social Innovation Database

Reference: Social Innovation Platform (<https://si.taiwan.gov.tw/>)

Figure 3: Social Innovation Proposals

Reference: Social Innovation Platform (<https://si.taiwan.gov.tw/>)

Figure 4: Event Page

Reference: Social Innovation Platform (<https://si.taiwan.gov.tw/>)

Figure 5: Corporate Social Responsibility Report

Reference: Social Innovation Platform (<https://si.taiwan.gov.tw/>)

ii. Social Innovation Database

To encourage social innovation organizations to disclose their social missions, products and services, and to guide society to understand the content of social innovation, and to assist the administrative ministries to be able to utilize such information, the Ministry of Economic Affairs issued the “Principles of Registration of Social Innovation Organizations” to establish the “Social Innovation Database”.

Once a social innovation organization discloses the items, such as its social missions, business model, or social influence, it may obtain the relevant promotional assistance resources, including becoming a trade partner with Buying Power (Social Innovation Products and Services Procurement), receiving exclusive consultation and assistance from professionals for social innovation organizations, and becoming qualified to apply to entering into the Social Innovation Lab. Moreover, the Ministry of Economic Affairs is simultaneously consolidating, identifying, and designating the awards and grants offered by the various ministries, policies and measures in respect of investment, and financing and assistance, as resources made available to registered entities.

As of 25 May 2021, there were 658 registered social innovation organizations and 96 Social Innovation Partners (enterprises with CSR or ESG resources that recognize the cooperation with social innovation under the social innovation thinking model may be registered as a “Social Innovation Partner”). The public and enterprises can search for organizations registered in the Social Innovation Database through the above-said Social Innovation Platform, the search ability of which advances the exposure of and the opportunities for cooperation with social innovation organizations.

Figure 6: Numbers of registered social innovation organizations and accumulated value of purchases under Buying Power

Reference: Social Innovation Platform(<https://si.taiwan.gov.tw/>)

iii. Buying Power - Social Innovation Products and Services Procurement

In order to continue increasing the awareness on social innovation organizations and related issues and promote responsible consumption and production in Taiwan, as well as to raise the attention of the commercial sector to the sustainability-driven procurement models, the Ministry of Economic Affairs held the first “Buying Power - Social Innovation Products and Services Procurement” event in 2017. Through the award system under the Buying Power, it continues to encourage the governments, state-owned enterprises, private

enterprises, and organizations to take the lead in purchasing products or services from social innovation organizations, to provide the relevant resources so as to assist social innovation organizations to obtain resources and to explore business opportunities in the markets, to practice responsible consumption and production, and to promote innovative cooperation between all industries and commerce and social innovation organizations.

The aim of the implementation of the Buying Power is to encourage the central and local governments, state-owned enterprises, private enterprises, and non-governmental organizations to purchase products or services from organizations registered in the Social Innovation Database, while prizes will be awarded based on the purchase amounts accumulated during the calculation period. The winners can obtain priority in applying for membership in the Social Innovation Partner Group, with corresponding member services, in the future.

Under the Social Innovation Platform, both the amount of purchase awards and the number of applicants for special awards continue to increase. So far, purchases have accumulated to a value of more than NT\$1.1 billion (see Figure 6), and more than 300 organizations have proactively participated.

iv. Social Innovation Mark

In order to promote public awareness of social innovation, the Ministry of Economic Affairs has been charged with the commissioned task of promoting the Social Innovation Mark, and issued “The Small and Medium Enterprise Administration of the Ministry of Economic Affairs Directions for Authorization of the Social Innovation Mark” as the standard for the authorization of the Social Innovation Mark. Social innovation organizations can use the Mark, through obtaining authorization, to hold Social Innovation Summits or other social innovation activities for promoting social innovation concepts.

In order to build the Mark as a conceptual symbol of social innovation, the Ministry of Economic Affairs has been using the Social Innovation Mark in connection with various social innovation activities, such as the Social Innovation Platform, the Buying Power, and the annual Social Innovation Summit. Taking the selection of sponsors of the Social Innovation Summit in 2022 as an example^[4], only organizations that have obtained authorization of the Social Innovation Mark can use the Mark to hold the Social Innovation Summit.

Figure 7: The Social Innovation Mark of the Small and Medium Enterprise Administration, Ministry of Economic Affairs

IV. Conclusion

The “Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development” (OECD) regards social innovation as a new strategy for solving future social problems and as an important method for youth entrepreneurship and social enterprise development. Taiwan’s social innovation energy has entered a stage of expansion and development. Through the promotion of the “Social Innovation Action Plan,” the resources from the central and local governments are integrated to establish the Social Innovation Platform, the Social Innovation Database, the Social Innovation Lab, and the Social Innovation Mark. In addition, incentives such as the Buying Power have been created, manifesting the positive influence of Taiwan’s social innovation.

[1] MDGs are put forward by the United Nations in 2000, and are also the goals requiring all the 191 member states and at least 22 international organizations of the United Nations to be committed to on their best endeavors, including: 1. eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, 2. applying universal primary education, 3. promoting gender equality and empowering women, 4. reducing child mortality rates, 5. improving maternal health, 6. combatting HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases, 7. ensuring environmental sustainability, and 8. establishing a global partnership for development.

[2] Please refer to the Social Innovation Platform: <https://si.taiwan.gov.tw/>.

[3] Please refer to the Social Innovation Database: https://si.taiwan.gov.tw/Home/Org_list.

[4] Please refer to the guidelines for the selection of sponsors of the 2022 Social Innovation Summit: <https://www.moeasmea.gov.tw/files/6221/4753E497-B422-4303-A8D4-35AE0B4043A9>

Links

- [Social Innovation Platform](#)
- [Social Innovation Database](#)
- [guidelines for the selection of sponsors of the 2022 Social Innovation Summit](#)

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