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Presentation on

How the Social Economy Can Contribute to Africa's Development – The Consumer Perspective

By

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Your Excellencies, Co-presidents and Members of the Joint Parliamentary Assembly, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with great honor that I join Mr. Luca JAHIER the President of ACP-EU Follow-up Committee of the European Economic and Social Committee to compliment his speech on a topic "How the Social Economy Can Contribute to Africa's Development – The Consumer Perspective".

Introduction

The social economy[■] and its numerous institutions like formal and informal cooperatives, social community group arrangements among others exist in Africa and contribute to the welfare of the citizens and development on a big scale irrespective of not being formally documented.

Social economy is understood and appreciated in Africa and other regions in many forms and delivers goods and services irrespective of societal and national challenges. Majority of us are beneficiaries of respective social economy arrangements directly and/or indirectly as we consume a number of its products.

Social economy has been around and will be around long enough to contribute to human, societal and national development globally. Examples are seen in challenging times within society. It played a role in absorbing effects of food and financial crisis where beneficiaries of the social economy were not greatly impacted due to collective social inclusiveness actions and solutions in society that enabled consumers sharing the limited resources available and accommodating those in need.

Africa's Social Economy in Action

Proposals to recognize, document and support formal growth of Africa's social economy and the roles it plays in societal development is greatly appreciated. As there are many cases where Africa's social economy has been and is still the answer to consumer and societal needs and challenges. Where the formal sector as in public and private sector fails to deliver goods and services as obligated and/or contracted entities, Africa's Social Economy (ASE) provides solutions to ignored sectors and/or to inadequate consumer basic needs.

Africa's social economy arrangements and approaches play a paramount role in promoting and sustaining inclusive societies irrespective of the endemic poverty and formal mechanism failures. Some of the examples through which the social economy in Africa fills gaps include:

- Cultural institutional arrangements:
 - Deliver food to consumers and guiding food production;
 - Promote food security practices: cultural and community leaders mobilize communities to produce, store and market responsibly. In Uganda the Buganda Kingdom and culture has a mandatory garden reserve practice – code named the “King's Garden” that is only access by the family when they are food insecure. Unfortunately the practice is not that effective these days, but it has a lot of potential in addressing food security;
 - Promote health, hygiene and sanitation practices: cultural and community leaders mobilize communities to clean homes, construct pit latrines, maintenance water sources – spring wells among others;
 - Cultural and community leaders mobilize communities to maintenance infrastructure – road networks, community establishments – housing. In Uganda the Buganda Kingdom and culture has a practices named “Bulungi Bwansi” meaning *its good for the country*.

- Community and collective land usage and food production through provision of human resource for land - farm preparation, planting, weeding and harvesting.

- Where there are no formal health care – medical facilities and doctors, the traditional facilities are up and running providing consumers accessible and affordable alternative services. They do save a number of consumers – irrespective of cases of death and unscrupulousness;

- Social economy – informal arrangements also play a role in consumer access to knowledge as in Indigenous Knowledge /or Traditional Knowledge that helps in addressing a number of societal challenges and maintenance of effective agricultural practices and production, saving of good varieties of crops and animals (that are productive, nutritious, resistant and pest control measures), sustainable environmental utilization, healthcare and vital knowledge for societal development and co-existence in diversity.

- Community solidarity and inclusiveness through collective approaches in times of need, saddens and danger through construction of homes, arranging funerals, harvest among others.
- Collective production, marketing and purchase by consumers, in particular small scale farmers engaged in subsistence farming:
 - Saving and sharing of agricultural inputs like seed. Caution should be taken not to criminalize them through Intellectual Property frameworks developed and others underway.
 - Informally and collectively saving their small earnings to meet their basic and production needs.

The examples above show how the social economic arrangements in Africa plays an important role in delivering a number of consumer basic needs, social amenities and contributing to development policy objectives through:

- Mobilization, development and maintenance of inclusive society and active citizenship;
- Provision of human resource for production – employment and markets;
- Promotion of solidarity and social inclusiveness enabling individuals and communities to work towards improvement of their socio-economic welfare and better society;

Challenges and Way Forward

With all the good said about the potential and deliverances of Africa's social economy, then why call for support and why are there endless socio-economic challenges evident in nearly every community on the continent?

The challenges are valid and it is worth noting that the informal – social economy caters for sizeable consumer population using inadequate and limited resources and capacities. Subsequently, rendering the social economy institutions' efforts inefficient on the surface but, in reality they have signification impact in respective societies.

Incorporation of Africa's Social Economy in the various EU Protocols and Agreements will go a long way in enhancing their contribution to consumers' welfare, protection and productivity in Africa.

The Contounu Agreement, EU-Africa Partnership, ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly, ACP-EU Councils and Commissions recognizing and putting the social economy as one of the pillars for Africa's development on the global development boardroom agendas will greatly contribute to improving approaches in addressing societal challenges faced by consumers.

Interventions in Africa's social economy and support mechanisms should contribute to facilitating respective institutions in Africa to effectively engage in the development agendas by supporting:

- stakeholder mapping and their respective activities.
- stakeholder institutions' needs assessment as alternative institutions.
- stakeholder dialogue on relevant societal development needs for sustainability.

- capacity building of cultural and informal institutions in institutional development and management.
- capacity building of cultural and informal institutions to effectively deliver goods and services in evolving times so that they become more effective in meeting consumer needs.
- capacity building of cultural and informal institutions to provide services in times of emergencies as they are always in the communities.
- cultural and informal social economy institutions' development programs in agricultural and food production, education, healthcare, economic productivity, marketing, appropriate technologies, infrastructure development and sustainable environmental utilization to effectively deliver and drive development.
- cultural and informal social economy institutions' to increase stakeholder participation and inclusiveness including the of consumers.
- cultural and informal social economy institutions' efforts of mobilizing resources to support social economy programs for Africa.

In conclusion, Africa's Social Economy (ASE) has a role to play in realizing the objectives of the respective development agendas like the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), National Development Programs, climate change, sustainable consumption and development among others. Thus ASE urgently needs recognition and support to effectively contribution to improvement of consumer welfare, protection, productivity, contribute to national development and promotion of sustainable, progressive and inclusive societies.

Lastly, Your Excellencies, Co-presidents and Members of the Joint Parliamentary Assembly, Ladies and Gentlemen, healthy and productive consumers are assets and foundations of national economies and have the force and potential to reduce poverty with enabling political environments.

Thank you for listening to me.

■ CONSENT – is a consumer - civil society organization in Uganda that strives and works for a socially informed, equitable and just society through empowerment of consumers, advisory services, promotion of ethical practices among businesses, advocacy and engagement of policymakers to enact pro-people policies for present and future generations. Designs and implements awareness, dialogues, policy research and advocacy programs through partnerships for effective policies to enhance consumers' safety and welfare, ethical practice, good governance, sustainable consumption and development. CONSENT is a member of Consumers International (CI).

■ Consumers International (CI) is the only independent global campaigning voice for consumers. With over 220 member organizations in 115 countries. Building a powerful international consumer movement to help protect and empower consumers everywhere. At 50 years in 2010, CI has campaigned and advocated for consumers since 1960.

■ ILO definition of Social Economy is a concept designating enterprises and organizations, in particular cooperative, mutual benefit societies, association, foundations and social enterprises which have the specific features of producing goods, services and knowledge, while pursuing both economic and social aims and fostering solidarity.
