

Charter for a social and solidarity-oriented economy of the Geneva region

Proposed by APRÈS-Chambre de l'économie sociale et solidaire

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"We are living under a hegemonic model of development that, in the South as in the North, leads to destruction, poverty, social and political exclusion, unemployment, etc. This model does not recognise as legitimate those activities that are indispensable to social life and, furthermore, threatens to menace the future of the planet. [...] We are engaged in the process of constructing a solidarity-based economy that questions the idea that human needs might be satisfied by the market and its alleged natural laws alone."

*Excerpt from the July 1997 Declaration of Lima
First International Meeting on the Globalisation of Solidarity.*

Prologue

The following charter draws from the values and practices of field workers based in the Geneva region and convened at the instigation of APRÈS – Chambre de l'économie sociale et solidaire, founded in 2003. The objective of APRÈS is to create points of contact between the different players in the social and solidarity-oriented (hereafter SSE) economy in order to develop common ideas, facilitate synergies, create new service offerings and generally support the interest in this type of economy¹.

By this charter, the participants in the Social and Solidarity oriented Economy (SSE)² in the Geneva region wish to communicate and recognise the values that define their common identity and orient their actions, while maintaining their wide range of characteristics. The cumulative effect of these specificities results in a « social value added » dimension which defines the SSE.

Signing this Charter is a contractual act. Each party thus commits itself to putting progressively into action the terms of the Charter, and to share these terms through its best efforts throughout all its networks. The terms of the Charter should be translated into daily activities as well as into all interactions with the private and public sector.

Each adhering party to this Charter will take to heart the priority of forging partnerships with those whose structure, mission, activities or objectives are closer to the values herein defended.

¹ For a brief history of the Social and Solidarity oriented Economy (SSE) as well as additional elements of comprehension and definitions, we invite the reader to access the summary proposed by APRÈS ("Fact Sheet of the SSE", on the web site www.apres-ge.ch).

² SSE actors include groups (organisations) as well as individuals (people) that can contribute to the SSE.

The seven SSE values

1. Social Wellbeing *have*

to be, not to

SSE actors aim to build an economy that affirms the primacy of the person over capital. They recognize the importance of immaterial dimensions (aesthetic, emotional, spiritual, etc.) that are necessary for the functioning of society and the fulfillment of its members.

2. Participative Citizenship and Democracy

each voice counts

SSE actors participate freely, equally and responsibly in the construction of a society that promotes the development of people and the common welfare. They apply a participative democracy that favours the sharing of information, of responsibilities, of decision-making processes, as well as the recognition of each person's role.

3. Ecology

produce to live, don't live to produce

SSE actors recognize the interdependence between socio-economic and ecological processes. They commit themselves to give priority to an economic system that respects an ecological balance with a concern for intra and intergenerational fairness.

4. Autonomy

autonomous but not individualistic

SSE actors value different competencies and strengthen people's capacity to act (as salaried employees, volunteers, members, users, investors) in their respective organisations. They aim for the greater autonomy of their organisation as well as a SSE in their relationships with the public sector and with other organisations in the private sector.

5. Solidarity

1 + 1 > 2

SSE actors give preference to collective interest over that of the individual. They promote the creation of social interdependent relationships at the local, regional and international level.

6. Diversity

rich in our differences

SSE actors commit themselves to understanding, respecting and valuing the differences between people and populations, to prohibiting any form of discrimination, and to seeking out the complementarities which favour mutual learning and understanding.

7. Coherence

say what we do and do what we say

SSE actors seek to apply in a coherent manner all the values mentioned above and at every operational level. Coherence between the recommended values and their implementation is essential to the credibility and development of the SSE.

A few principles of action illustrating the values of the SSE

Reminder This non-exhaustive selection of principles must be read as a set of objectives towards which one can strive. Each person or organisation will adapt these principles to their situation and their possibilities. Some goals can be reached, others only partially and some not at all. What counts is the general spirit in which the person or organisation acts. These values and principles should be, in the medium term, a benchmark for those organisations that wish to be part of the SSE.

Respect for SOCIAL WELLBEING

Every SSE participant commits to (the following):

- Define, protect and develop the social usefulness of SSE activities and eschew all organisations that contribute to violence, destruction and other forms of submissiveness.
- Develop economic relations with production channels that offer fair working conditions and wages.
- Pursue a non-profit or limited profit objective. The potential profits are first reinvested in activities that promote social objectives.
- Support cultural, educational and artistic activities, with respect for the immaterial dimension that is essential for people and society at large.
- Favour a balanced representation between staff and various decision-making entities, as well as in all activities with regards to gender, age, place of origin, etc., of the people involved.
- Keep informed and promote awareness of the issue of fairness and social justice.
- Create opportunities for the development of other ways of operating or thinking.
- ...

Respect for DEMOCRACY and RESPONSIBILITY

Every SSE participant commits to the following:

- Seek equality: one person has one voice.
- Allocate responsibility and decision-making powers as close as possible to the action and the users, favouring a horizontal structure.
- Ensure that for each activity or project, the people or parties that are more or less directly concerned (staff, users, beneficiaries, costumers, as well as suppliers, and in certain cases even civil or political groups, etc.) are consulted and that their positions are taken into consideration in the implementation of such projects.
- Consult with the staff on any decisions regarding the choice or the appointment or extension of their supervisors.
- Encourage all types of open expression and favour the identification and resolution of internal tensions and conflicts in a participative manner.
- Promote a spirit of cooperation and the sharing of means of action, particularly by working in teams and in networks, as well as through information and awareness-building (in and beyond the SSE organisations).
- On a daily basis, be aware of and acknowledge differences, points of convergence and multiculturalism.
- ...

Respect for the ENVIRONMENT

Limit ones ecological footprint as participant of SSE by:

- Willingly applying moderation and restraint, in order to reduce the ecological footprint of the activity.
- Knowing, applying and sharing solutions and practices that are most respectful of the environment: waste sorting, recuperation, recycling, use of renewable energy, sustainable mobility, energy savings (water, electricity, gas, petrol, etc.).
- Giving preference to consumption of local and seasonal products.
- Developing trading and consumer relations with production channels that respect natural ecological cycles and minimise the use of fossil energies.
- Giving preference to the application of such solutions, even if they are more expensive.
- ...

Respect for LABOUR

Every participant of the SSE aims to provide staff full ownership of his or her tasks and of his or her scope of work:

- Promote a work environment with conditions that enhance job satisfaction.
- Ensure transparency, particularly in communication and financial matters.
- Publish the salaries of all staff and seek to reduce excessive wage disparities.
- Offer a stable job to employees with medium and long term perspectives.
- Value competencies and facilitate ongoing lifelong training opportunities.
- Adjust jobs and work schedules on a case-by-case basis and in a realistic manner for each person.
- Encourage the self-organisation of work by the staff concerned.
- Integrate people who are at odds with their environment or going through a difficult professional patch.
- ...

Respect for COHERENCE

To promote our values in a credible manner is to:

- Share a clear understanding of the values that guide SSE organisations.
- Communicate and inform in a transparent and efficient manner, which is consistent with our actions.
- Undertake all activities with a long term vision or process.
- Give preference to partnerships with actors who base their activities on similar values and principles; strengthen our cooperation.
- Ensure autonomy in the decision-making and finances of the organisation, as well as respect for its values and mission in all contracts with third parties.
- Raise awareness and promote SSE.
- Anticipate and influence, rather than wait and be pushed around.
- Put in place and respect all measures that allow for compliance with the Charter as well as its regular evaluation, in order to manage any risks of incoherence.
- Distribute and promote the Charter within your SSE organisation.
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