

COMMON GOOD FIRST
SOCIAL INNOVATION IN
SOUTH AFRICA: A
CONSOLIDATED OVERVIEW



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Work Package I Overview and Consolidated Social Innovation Overview

The objective of WP I is to provide the Common Good First project with a diagnosis of the state of social innovation in South Africa. Overall, the diagnostic study aimed “*to identify principle needs of the region and existing practices in the field of social innovation and digital literacy*” (Common Good First 2016, 56). The first deliverable (1.1) provided an initial report on social innovation to contextualise the Common Good First project. This second part (1.2) aimed to investigate social innovation more thoroughly in a diagnostic survey of the concept. The survey of social innovation investigated contemporary trends in social innovation literature internationally and in South Africa. Conclusively, this deliverable provided the foundation for the final WPI report, (deliverable 1.3) at the end of the Common Good First project in 2019. The results of the final survey and a reflection on the changing South African context are presented in deliverable 1.3.

A number of databases were consulted including Google Scholar and academic databases to investigate the use of social innovation in South African debates. The surveys were carried out at the beginning of the project (2016) and towards the end (2019). The consolidated report presents the findings of the final survey and aims to provide a brief reflection as to the changing South African context. Although several definitions of social innovation are available, in the broadest sense the following definition was used by Common Good First partners, combining Murray, Caulier-Grice & Mulgan (2010) and Frances Westley and Nino Antadze (2010)’s conceptualisations: “*new ideas (products, processes, programs, services, platforms and models) that contribute to changing routines, beliefs and resources to simultaneously transform social needs and create new social relationships or collaborations (ibid, 3), to enable a society’s development*”.

The results of the database searches in 2017 and 2019 reflect an increased attention and use of the word social innovation within the South African context. Yet, despite the increased numbers of hits shown, social innovation is still in its ‘infancy’ in South Africa compared to other more advanced countries. Most research merely makes reference to different forms of social entrepreneurship, while only making fleeting reference to ‘social innovation’ in keyword format. By and large, social innovation began to feature in South African media from 2010 onwards. Currently, it is performed by actors within the academic institutions, businesses (e.g. South African Breweries) and fewer NGOS compared to the first round of research carried out during the Common Good First project (2016). Compared to the previous findings up until 2016, the overriding themes in social innovation studies have remained within the focus of public universities as well as major societal challenges, yet the focus of the societal challenges have shifted away from a focus on health to other issues such as waste management, urban development and local economic development. This is indicative of current

pressing societal issues which have gained traction in the public discourse over the past three years. It can therefore be deduced that social innovation is increasingly understood as a solution for pressing societal and economic issues. In addition, most studies can still be found in South African journals, indicating that the focus and audience of these articles are mainly local in nature. This would seem intuitive as local issues are being addressed through local research on local social innovation efforts.