



Interview

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Nelo Emerencia, Advisory Board Member of 3-CO

In today's rapidly evolving world, innovation is often synonymous with technological advancements and cutting-edge products. However, there is a crucial aspect of innovation that focuses on societal impact and human well-being and that can significantly foster the uptake of innovative products and processes: social innovation. Defined as the development and implementation of new solutions to address pressing social needs and challenges, social innovation can transform the way societies tackle issues ranging from healthcare and education to environmental sustainability and social equity.

For which societal challenges do you consider solutions provided through social innovations key?

For the need for citizens, consumers, the society at large to change. Change is needed for healthier consumption with smaller environmental footprint;

for the constant awareness and drive to recycle and reuse material; for the necessity to accept new, sustainable solutions.

Are there any results of social innovation initiatives that you use in your own work? (If yes, which?)

Yes, the initiatives by many universities across Europe to assist in the creation of sustainable bio-based ecosystems as a response to societal needs to protect the environment and enhance biodiversity.

Education in chemistry and biochemistry at university levels has been constantly changing since early 21st century to enable industry to address these societal challenges while remaining efficient and competitive. Education is more than knowledge transfer. Effective education can help design innovative methods and tools to empower citizens and consumers to participate with industry in a circular bio-society. In this bio-society, informed citizens choose a sustainable way of life, supporting an economy that couples economic

growth with societal well-being and respect for the environment.

Industry is committed to partner with educational institutions to help include needed skills and competencies in curricula at all levels, including vocational levels. We are building on the results of Coordination and Support Actions (CSAs) in the BBI JU¹ such as UrBIOfuture,² on the success of the BioVoices kids' book (2021),³ etc. In addition, we stimulate and support the increasing drive for sustainable entrepreneurship by graduating students through our programme Bio-based Innovation Student Challenge – Europe (BISC-E)⁴, we build partnerships with the EU Youth Ambassadors, the Bioeconomy youth champions of the IACGB⁵, the GenB⁶ project, etc., to include the voice of the youth in our programmes.

In your opinion, what are key characteristics or features of successful social innovations?

Successful social innovations include characteristics that citizens and consumers recognise, accept, and apply as actions that improve the well-being

of humans and the environment. Only successful social innovations will cause a lasting change in behaviour towards sustainability.

¹ The Bio-based Industries Joint Undertaking (BBI JU) is the first public private partnership between the European Union represented by the European Commission, and the bio-based industries represented by the Bio-based Industries Consortium (BIC) under Horizon 2020. BBI JU is succeeded by the Circular Bio-based Europe Joint Undertaking (CBE JU) under Horizon Europe, the current EU's research and innovation programme. The partnership funds projects advancing competitive circular bio-based industries under Horizon Europe; <https://www.cbe.europa.eu/>

² <https://www.urbiofuture.eu/>

³ <https://eubionet.eu/the-biovoices-book-for-kids-whats-bioeconomy-official-launch-event/>

⁴ <https://biconsortium.eu/about-bisc-e>

⁵ International Advisory Council on Global Bioeconomy; <https://www.iacgb.net/>

⁶ The GenB project is all about educating and empowering the Generation Bioeconomy (GenB), aware, sensitive and interested in environmental issues, sustainability and circularity; <https://www.genb-project.eu/>