
Comments of the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD on the country strategic opportunities programme 2026–2031 for the Dominican Republic

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Action: The Executive Board is invited to review the comments of the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD on the country strategic opportunities programme 2026–2031 for the Dominican Republic.

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Comments of the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD on the country strategic opportunities programme 2026–2031 for the Dominican Republic

I. General comments

1. The Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE) completed its first country strategy and programme evaluation (CSPE) for the Dominican Republic in February 2025 and presented the report at the 128th session of the Evaluation Committee. The CSPE covered 2011–2024, which included two country strategic opportunities programmes (COSOPs) for 2010–2017 and 2018–2025, and five loans with a total value of US\$153.6 million, of which US\$62.8 million was financed by IFAD. The CSPE also reviewed eight multi-country grants and non-lending activities including knowledge management, partnerships and policy engagement.
2. The evaluation found that overall performance was moderately unsatisfactory. The strategy and the programme were well aligned with the country's priorities in terms of poverty reduction and rural development, but only a few aspects of the Dominican Republic's new rural reality were covered. The programme lacked structured and systematic attention to specific issues such as: (i) an updated vision for territorial development and urban-rural interaction; (ii) multifunctional family farming for generational handover; (iii) the potential and fragility of agro-ecosystems; and (iv) emigration and immigration phenomena. The evaluation highlighted gaps in non-lending activities and the adequacy of support to farmers' groups and organizations. There were also weaknesses in knowledge management for policy engagement and decision-making. Moreover, the strong commitment of producers' organizations was not supported by tailored interventions, and there were consistent problems related to the type of organizations and investments supported, which affected the sustainability of benefits.
3. The CSPE made six recommendations to guide the new COSOP. The first (partially accepted), was to promote a paradigm shift in the COSOP and operations through a model that fosters local capacities, knowledge, culture and strategies for engagement with farmers' organizations and enterprises. Growing urban-rural interactions, the potential of local agrobiodiversity and climate vulnerabilities should be considered. The second (partially accepted) recommendation was an increased focus on viability and sustainability, moving from "atomized" interventions to development and territorial management with tailored investments and support. The third (partially accepted) recommendation was to promote interventions aimed at the sustainable management of natural resources and climate change adaptation. The fourth (partially accepted) recommendation was to support public institutions and policies, institutional partnerships and innovations. The fifth (fully accepted) recommendation was to strengthen project management with appropriate technical skills. The sixth (partially accepted) recommendation requested the Government and IFAD to conduct a joint review of the investments supported by previous projects to define differentiated measures that support their sustainability.
4. The new COSOP's overall objective is to contribute to inclusive rural transformation by strengthening institutions, supporting inclusive and climate-resilient practices in priority value chains, and expanding access to inclusive finance. It has three strategic objectives: (i) catalyse income growth and entrepreneurship among rural populations, with a focus on women and youth; (ii) improve the resilience of rural people and landscapes to climate change; and (ii) improve the effectiveness of agricultural and rural development policies.

5. The new COSOP referred to the CSPE findings related to gaps in knowledge management, policy engagement and operational models. In section II.B., paragraph 28, it specified: "(i) leveraging local capacities, knowledge, culture, and strategies with associative groups and ventures; (ii) shifting from isolated interventions to territorial development and management; (iii) enhancing knowledge exchange and inter-institutional partnerships; (iv) strengthening project management; and (v) integrating credit, grant and technical assistance interventions". Appendices III and IV elaborate on several issues raised in the CSPE regarding the Dominican Republic's rural context and challenges. However, several issues require strategic and operational guidance to strengthen the COSOP's internal coherence and maximize the impact of future operations.

II. Specific comments

6. **Targeting strategies.** The CSPE outlined the need to continue refining IFAD's targeting strategies. To prioritize productive areas, the new COSOP recommends using criteria from the Supérate Program and the Sistema Único de Beneficiarios [Single System of Beneficiaries; SIUBEN]) poverty index for target group identification and territorial studies (e.g. agronomy, climate and profitability). Useful information is available in appendices II, III, IV. However, the targeting section (III.C) is generic, focusing on poor populations with the potential to take on complex challenges (e.g. improvement of production, adoption of efficient irrigation, access to markets). If this approach is chosen, further measures must be taken to mitigate the risks of excluding poor and vulnerable households. In addition, the COSOP does not provide details on how to strengthen the targeting approach for women, youth and migrants based on lessons learned from previous projects.
7. **Market access.** The CSPE found persistent weaknesses in value chain development, including public-private partnerships and market access, resulting in unsustainable investments. Through its strategic objective 1: catalyse income growth and entrepreneurship among rural populations, with a focus on women and youth, the new COSOP proposes interventions that focus on access to a range of financial products and technologies, certification processes, digital tools and e-commerce. The objective is to increase the integration of poor and vulnerable rural groups into formal markets, and to create decent employment. To overcome problems encountered in the past, it will be necessary to clarify: (i) criteria and methods for the selection of producer associations; (ii) what support will help to meet market demand in line with local strategies and producer capacities; and (iii) how support will contribute to territorial dynamics to avoid the fragmentation of interventions. Moreover, future public-private partnerships should incorporate lessons learned from previous projects.
8. **Sustainable territorial management.** The CSPE highlighted the need for applying a territorial approach and for interventions aimed at sustainable management of natural resources and climate change adaptation. The new COSOP moves in this direction through its strategic objective 2: improve the resilience of rural people and landscapes to climate change, by proposing investments in irrigation, low-emission technologies and adaptation practices (e.g. diversified and resilient crops, community strategies). This approach would be strengthened by clarifying operational approaches for establishing linkages between the diversification of production and the promotion of sustainable and climate-smart practices. It could also clarify how local governance systems such as irrigation committees, provincial and municipal councils, and producer associations can lead to scalable territorial models.
9. **Scaling up and non-lending activities.** The CSPE noted limitations in scaling up and policy dialogue due to project dispersion, and weaknesses in knowledge management and partnerships. The COSOP lays the groundwork for scaling up

across the three strategic objectives and for policy engagement with strategic objective 3: Improve the effectiveness of agricultural and rural development policies. Due to resource limitations, it is important to prioritize interventions that inform policies and can be replicated by a diverse range of public and private actors (beyond individual projects). This is a positive development, but remains ambitious, requiring the strengthening of public and private institutions. To this end, two critical issues should be made more explicit in future programme documents.

- (i) Allocate resources to design and implement a structured multi-level and multi-stakeholder capacity-development proposal that includes the central actors in the COSOP, such as producers and their organizations, public institutions, members of councils and other local planning and management bodies, and IFAD project management units. This requires a systematic effort to assess demands, adjust activities in line with contexts and establish partnerships that enhance capacity development. South-South and Triangular Cooperation is one possible approach since the country (section IV.G and appendix VII) has an institutional framework and policy guidelines in this regard.
- (ii) Allocate technical and financial resources to support non-lending activities and develop partnerships that facilitate achievement of the new COSOP's policy and scaling-up goals (section IV.F). This also implies raising capacities for improved monitoring and evaluation so that it becomes strategic and systematic.

III. Final comments

- 10. The COSOP 2026–2031, prepared by IFAD and the Government of the Dominican Republic, takes into account the fact that the Dominican Republic reached the Graduation Discussion Income threshold. It aims to support an inclusive and resilient rural economy in line with national development priorities. It addresses some findings and recommendations of the CSPE, and its appendices contain valuable information for enriching operational designs in complex and dynamic contexts. The COSOP provides clear strategic objectives, but the strategic orientation requires further detail to leverage the added value of IFAD in the country. It is important to establish effective and decentralized mechanisms for project management and coordination, which make it possible to overcome challenges encountered in the past.
- 11. IOE remains available for further explanation and acknowledges the receipt of the agreement at completion point signed by both the Government and IFAD Management.