

## 12. DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

# ANALYSIS OF LESSONS LEARNED BY THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC IN LOCAL AND INSTITUTIONAL/ GOVERNMENT-LEVEL MONITORING, EVALUATION AND PARTICIPATORY FOLLOW-UP

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### INTRODUCTION

Recently, the merits and features of participatory follow-up and evaluation have been a matter of heated debate. Several academic and empirical trends are evident, both in the fields of development theory and policy design. Donors in Latin America and other regions insist on the inclusion of primary stakeholders in follow-up and evaluation activities, and non-governmental organizations are increasingly doing so.

Programmes and projects are aimed at impacting public policy areas, either at the national, regional or local levels. For this reason, programmes must be subject to a monitoring, follow-up and evaluation plan that, in turn, is part of a follow-up and evaluation system capable of improving the plan's effectiveness and applicability. To be effective, a follow-up and evaluation system must include a participatory component that takes into account both direct and indirect stakeholders eligible to support its implementation.

This paper describes the contributions of a 'community' or 'participatory' follow-up system of planning, follow-up and evaluation efforts that have participatory components and outcomes, analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT analysis) and lessons learned resulting from such experiences.

## MAIN CONTENTS

In the past, development programmes failed to systematically include evaluation activities. Currently, most programmes—unfortunately not all—include some type of evaluation component. Most programme managers or coordinators agree that evaluations are not only necessary, but are also relevant to inform adequate decision-making regarding the strengthening of programme implementation strategies.

To improve its efficiency, a follow-up and evaluation system must be endowed with a participatory component that considers direct and indirect stakeholders that are able to contribute to the system's implementation. Community follow-up systems play an important role in community capacity-building by empowering communities to monitor and assess efforts aimed at improving their socio-economic status. Participatory follow-up and evaluation provides several innovations regarding conventional follow-up and evaluation methods. Their distinctive features result from the four basic principles applied to project and public policy evaluations: participation, learning, negotiation and process flexibility.

**Participation** means including populations in process design and data analysis, a significant difference from conventional systems. **Learning**, particularly hands-on learning, entails a basis for continuous improvement and corrective actions. **Negotiation** between the highest possible number of cohorts (e.g. population, donors, civil service) builds consensus on what should be subject to follow-up and evaluation, how and when data should be collected, the meaning of information, how to share results and what actions should be undertaken. **Process flexibility** is essential to adapt to changes in beneficiaries (e.g. number, role, knowledge) and their context. Rather than merely identifying issues and shortcomings, evaluation programmes should focus on gathering lessons learned for future use, both from successes and from challenges.

A participatory evaluation process can help improve programme staff communication during the programme's various implementation levels.

Although the Dominican Republic still has limited experience in participatory and follow-up evaluation, the country is taking the necessary steps to promote social methods that help communities take part in the development and follow-up of public policies, plans, programmes and projects. These efforts have been classified into three categories: local efforts focused on and organized for programmes and projects; efforts focused on local, institutional-type issues; and national efforts focused on the design, follow-up and evaluation of public policies and national development plans.

A SWOT analysis of these experiences has resulted in the following conclusions:

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Increased community empowerment regarding socio-economic challenges Increased effectiveness in information collection Participation helps improve programme and project performance	Poor civil society participation Need further training in information collection methods Neither local governments nor public policies promote these organizations No budget for their development
THREATS	OPPORTUNITIES
Civil society wants to concentrate these types of initiatives Involvement of political parties in these organizations	Interest of multinational organizations in their development Populations are interested

## CONCLUSIONS

While some steps have been taken at the legal level, in practice, participatory follow-up and evaluation is limited in the Dominican Republic; experiences in the field are not being replicated.

Local follow-up committees have specific experience in participatory follow-up and evaluation, based on community follow-up system methodologies and principles.

Institutional participatory venues are an adequate participatory follow-up and evaluation mechanism, but need to be strengthened.

More opportunities for participation at the local institutional level must be developed, but with increased civil society involvement. Currently, 50 percent are formed by representatives of national and local governments.