

Enabling Social Innovation in Costa Rica



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Country Snapshot

Social innovation: "the processes and outcomes of developing novel approaches to address societal challenges facing people and planet." ↓

This snapshot represents a descriptive, non-exhaustive overview of key highlights from Costa Rica’s social innovation ecosystem.

✓ Direct focus on social innovation 🔗 Connected but indirect focus on social innovation ✗ No focus on social innovation

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Official Definition of Social Innovation 🔗



Costa Rica has **no official legal definition** of social innovation. Government, academia and civil society typically use the term to describe **community-driven or institutional innovations** that improve social inclusion, sustainability and wellbeing.

Government Body for Social Innovation ✓



There is **no dedicated national agency** for social innovation. Related functions are supported by:

- **MICITT** – leads innovation and digital-transformation policies tied to inclusion and productivity.
- **MDHIS** – integrates innovative approaches in social inclusion and anti-poverty programs.
- **INA** – provides entrepreneurship, skills development and community-level innovation training.
- **COMEX** – supports trade, investment, and competitiveness policies that can enable innovation-oriented and inclusive business development.
- **MTSS** – Dirección de Economía Social Solidaria – supports Costa Rica’s social and solidarity economy, including cooperative, associative, and community-based economic models.
- **MEIC** – supports MSMEs, entrepreneurship, competitiveness, and business development, providing an important institutional channel for inclusive and socially oriented enterprise support.

Government Strategy for Social Innovation ✓



Costa Rica lacks a standalone strategy but integrates SI concepts into:

- **National Development and Public Investment Plan (PNDIP)** – focuses on innovation, territorial inclusion and sustainability.
- **National Science, Technology and Innovation Plan** – mission-oriented research, capacity-building, digital inclusion.
- **Bioeconomy Strategy (2020)** – supports sustainable, inclusive innovation, particularly for rural and Indigenous communities.
- **Social and Solidarity Economy Policy**: Includes a specific line of action on the promotion of innovation for the social and solidarity economy, including competitive funds through the Development Banking System for social and solidarity economy enterprises, start-ups, incubators, accelerators, and other organisations developing innovations to address social, environmental, and economic challenges. It also includes free studies, upon request, for PROCOMER target companies on specific sectors or products.

Policies, Laws & Regulations

Social-innovation-specific: None.

Broader enabling frameworks:

- **Strong cooperative legislation** (General Law of Cooperatives, 1968; INFOCOOP) supports >600 cooperatives central to social innovation.
- **Social Responsibility Promotion Law (2011)** – encourages CSR and sustainability reporting.
- **National Innovation System rules** – govern public R&D support, entrepreneurship and innovation funding.
- **Environmental and biodiversity laws** – robust frameworks (protected areas, PES) create long-standing incentives for eco-social innovation.

Official Statistics

There are **no SI-specific statistics**. However, the government collects extensive data on **cooperatives, social programs, R&D, entrepreneurship and environmental services** (e.g., INFOCOOP, MICITT).

Government Programs

Programs explicitly labelled “social innovation” do not exist, but several support relevant activities:

- **MICITT Innovation Funds** – competitive funding for SMEs, universities and communities and innovation-oriented projects.
- **Promotora Costarricense de Innovación e Investigación (PCII)**: As part of the MICITT ecosystem, supports the promotion of innovation and research, helping strengthen Costa Rica’s broader innovation capacity.
- **Procomer programs** (Descubre, Encadenamientos Productivos) – strengthen value chains and innovative business models.
- **INA entrepreneurship programs** – skills and community innovation.
- **IMAS pilots** – test innovative approaches to service delivery for vulnerable groups.
- **MEIC** – Department of Entrepreneurship and Entrepreneurship Development: Supports entrepreneurship, MSME development, and business formalization, providing an enabling channel for inclusive and socially oriented enterprises.
- **MTSS** – Directorate of Social and Solidarity Economy / PRONATYPE: Supports micro and small productive initiatives, particularly among vulnerable populations, through financing and technical assistance linked to employment, income generation, and the social and solidarity economy

ECOSYSTEM

Stakeholders

Central/regional non-governmental bodies

- **CIS–UCR** – territorial and community innovation hub (est. 2018).
- **TEC Innovation Center** – applied research and entrepreneurship support.
- **Parque la Libertad Foundation** – community development and innovation lab.
- **Centro Latinoamericano de Innovación y Emprendimiento (CELIEM)** – Regional platform supporting innovation, entrepreneurship, and ecosystem-building across Latin America, including through knowledge exchange, training, and support for entrepreneurs and innovation actors.

Sectoral Networks

- **INFOCOOP, CONACOOOP** – major cooperative-sector coordinators.
- **AED** – business network advancing sustainability and inclusive business.
- **Yo Emprendedor** – national entrepreneurship community including social ventures.



Non-Financial Support Organisations

- **Incubators/accelerators:** Parque la Libertad Innovation Lab; Caricaco; UCR, TEC, UNED incubators.
- **Foundations/NGOs:** CRUSA; Fundecooperación.
- **Research bodies:** UCR, UNA, TEC produce SI-related research.



Support Initiatives

Typical initiatives include incubation/acceleration for impact ventures, community labs (e.g., Parque la Libertad), circular-economy and sustainability programs (e.g., CRUSA–IDB Lab), and youth innovation challenges (Yo Emprendedor, TechBridge).



Collaboration

Partnerships are emerging:

- **CRUSA + public institutions** – bioeconomy, climate innovation, rural entrepreneurship.
- **IDB Lab** – digital inclusion and sustainable-production pilots.
- **University–municipality labs** – territorial co-creation models (e.g., UCR hubs).



Events & Awards

Events: Yo Emprendedor “Seedstars CR,” Impact Hub/Caricaco demo days, university innovation fairs.

Awards: Yo Emprendedor Competition; CRUSA Challenge for environmental/social innovation.

FINANCE



Financing Schemes

Estimated annual total: No robust national aggregate is available. Existing evidence points to a fragmented mix of public programmes, cooperative finance, foundations and development-partner funding, without a consolidated annual figure



Main Financing Types

- **Government:** MICITT innovation funds; INA programs; Procomer competitiveness tools.
- **Cooperative sector:** INFOCOOP loans and reinvestment mechanisms.
- **Foundations:** CRUSA, Fundecooperación (grants, blended finance).
- **International organisations:** IDB, IDB Lab, UNDP, EU projects.
- **Private sector:** CSR funds in banking, agriculture, energy.
- **Academic incubators:** seed funding for early-stage SI projects.
- **Development finance:** The Sistema de Banca para el Desarrollo (SBD) provides financing and support instruments for entrepreneurs, MSMEs, and productive initiatives, including those with social, environmental, or territorial development objectives.
- **Public/social banking:** Banco Popular y de Desarrollo Comunal, including FODEMIPYME, supports micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises through financing and guarantee mechanisms, helping expand access to capital for inclusive and community-oriented ventures.



Financing Inclusivity

Funding frequently targets **rural and Indigenous communities, women entrepreneurs, low-income groups and agricultural cooperatives**. Regional disparities remain, though cooperative structures expand inclusion.

Public Awareness of Social Innovation



The term “social innovation” is not widely used, but themes such as **sustainability, cooperativism, digital inclusion, community development and climate innovation** appear frequently in public discourse.

Research



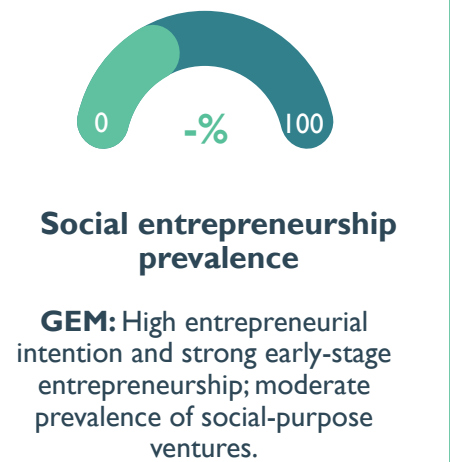
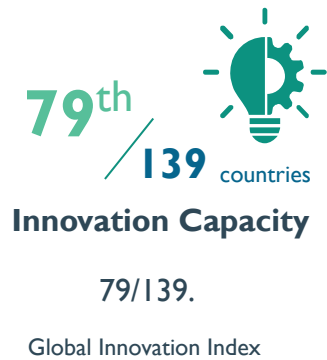
- **Universities (UCR, UNA, TEC)** lead research on social economy, community innovation and sustainability.
- **CIS–UCR** specialises in territorial SI models.
- Practitioner research from **CRUSA, IDB Lab and UNDP** addresses impact entrepreneurship and climate resilience.

Education & Human Capital



- **Formal programs:** Courses in social economy, sustainability, innovation management, rural development; some master’s programs include SI components.
- **Informal programs:** Accelerator training (Caricaco, Yo Emprendedor), bootcamps, community innovation labs.
- **No data** on the share of graduates with SI-related credentials.

Entrepreneurship



Social & Environmental Consciousness

