



Dominican Republic President Luis Abinader speaks in New York on August 13, 2023. Photo: Shutterstock

Dominican Republic



Photo: Fernanda Cabrera

SONIA GUZMÁN,
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
AMBASSADOR TO THE US

Dominican Republic Ambassador Sonia Guzmán, the country's first woman representative, has assisted President Abinader in strengthening the nation's position on the world stage.

Primed for Investment

The IMF pegs the country as Latin America's second fastest-growing in 2023, with the World Bank projecting a 4.8% GDP rise – a prime opportunity for investors.

The current climate is ripe for investment in the Dominican Republic. With its display of economic resilience and burgeoning prospects, the nation has garnered significant attention, especially from the United States—a country that shares a deep bilateral bond with this Caribbean gem. In 2022 alone, the inflow of foreign direct investments reached a staggering US\$4 billion. “The United States is undeniably our principal ally,” remarked Ambassador Sonia Guzmán, a key figure behind the 2005 Free Trade Agreement between the Dominican Republic, the US, and Central America (CAFTA).

President Luis Abinader, who assumed leadership in 2020, is key to the country’s recent success, adeptly navigated the nation through the pandemic’s challenges with a well-crafted recovery blueprint. Beyond that, he articulated a visionary roadmap for the country’s future—a blueprint that is pro-business, champions investments, and heralds transparency, with a special emphasis on fortifying ties with the US. “We must accentuate our relationship with the United States, aspiring for a unique bond,” he voiced.

The country’s Central Bank was also instrumental in orchestrating a formidable post-pandemic comeback. “In 2021, the Dominican Republic witnessed an unparalleled 12.3% growth, leading Latin America,” declared Héctor Valdez Albizu, the bank’s Governor. Committed to its constitutional autonomy, the bank ensured that its monetary policies remained impartial, devoid of political influence. “Such autonomy not only safeguards our fiscal and monetary policies but also strengthens our affiliations with renowned global institutions such as the Monetary Fund, World Bank, and the Inter-American Development Bank,” said Governor Albizu.

Leveraging this fortified position, the Dominican Republic has rolled out a plethora of lucrative business ventures.

“In 2021, the Dominican Republic experienced exceptional growth of 12.3%.”

HÉCTOR VALDEZ ALBIZU,
GOVERNOR, CENTRAL BANK OF
THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Highlighting current sectors ripe for investment, Scotiabank República Dominicana’s CEO Gonzalo Gil highlighted “immense potential” in construction, industry, free trade zones, retail, mining, and agribusiness. Looking to the future though, the country has its gaze fixed on unconventional sectors. One notable example is the transformation of solid waste into energy sources. “Such avant-garde investment avenues are incredibly enticing for us,” noted Ambassador Guzmán.

The combination of these fresh avenues and the nation’s solid bond with the US is bound to reinforce its economic foundation. “Our bond with the US signifies reliability, transparency, and a horizon brimming with promise,” stated the ambassador. ■

Q: How significant is the Dominican Republic’s relation with the US?

We have extraordinarily good relations where there is fluid communication. We are defending the same values and principles of transparency, human rights, free access to information, and independent justice.

“We are a stable country with a strong, peaceful democracy.”

Q: Why should investors look to the Dominican Republic?

The country has recovered from the pandemic, with thriving tourism and foreign investment. The financial system is 100% privatized with strong supervision, and there are excellent ports, airports, and connectivity.

Q: What sets your country apart from others in the region?

We are a stable country with a strong, peaceful democracy and rich history, and were the first in the Americas for many things including the first cathedral and hospital.



“This country has a lot of potential, not just in tourism.”

GONZALO GIL
CEO, SCOTIABANK
REPÚBLICA DOMINICANA

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INTERVIEW



HÉCTOR VALDEZ ALBIZU,
GOVERNOR, CENTRAL BANK
OF THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Héctor Valdez Albizu, Central Bank Governor of the Dominican Republic, draws from over 40 years of experience to fortify the nation's financial health and ensure currency stability.

Q: How are you working to strengthen the Dominican Republic's global reputation?

As an autonomous entity, we manage monetary and financial policies independently, strengthening ties with global

entities like the Monetary Fund, World Bank, and Inter-American Development Bank.

Q: What initiatives have you brought in to ensure the country remains fiscally competitive?

We prioritize enforcing prudential banking standards, complying with anti-money laundering laws, and enhancing bank capitalization. Additionally, we've established a secure, real-time payment system and have bolstered our cybersecurity.

Q: What is the Central Bank's strategy to mitigate potential future global downturns?

We are focusing on energy efficiency, developing infrastructure, expanding free trade zones, and promoting upcoming sectors such as pharmaceuticals.

Escape to Paradise

Basking beneath sun-kissed skies and fringed by pristine beaches, the Dominican Republic is experiencing a meteoric rise in tourism. In just the opening act of 2023, visitor numbers swelled by a striking 35.7% compared to the prior year. Speedily bouncing back from pandemic shadows, this Caribbean gem is outshining its regional peers.

Punta Cana, home to 70% of the country's famed all-inclusive havens, remains the crown

jewel. The lavishly refurbished Sanctuary Cap Cana, with its US\$45 million facelift in 2019, stands testament. "The country is ripe for substantial investment," proclaims manager Roger Belletti.

Underlining this sentiment is the ambitious US\$2.2 billion Cabo Rojo-Pedernales blueprint. A testament to President Abinader's vision, it promises a new cruise terminal, international air gateway, and room for over 12,000 eager travelers. ■



Jetsetting Growth

Departamento Aeroportuario (DA) plays a crucial role in the Dominican Republic's tourism-focused economy, contributing to sustainable development and establishing key investment opportunities.



"We have generated confidence in the entire airport sector, both private and state."

VÍCTOR NICOLÁS PICHARDO CUSTODIO, DEPARTAMENTO AEROPORTUARIO (DA)

Executive director Víctor Nicolás Pichardo Custodio is entrusted with ensuring that DA's eight international airports meet quality and operational safety standards, all

while delivering President Luis Abinader's vision for the Dominican Republic's world-class tourism sector. "The growth that our country has seen in the last two and a half years is due to the strategy of our government and our president," said Mr. Pichardo.

DA's focus is for each airport to comply with quality and operational safety standards. Delegates provide constant monitoring and reporting to maintain high-quality services. "Eighty-five percent of visitors come through our airports, highlighting the importance of quality in our air terminals," noted Mr. Pichardo.

The Dominican Republic's tourism industry contributed 24% of GDP in 2022. Stability and economic growth have further

attracted interest from the United States – the country's biggest tourism market. "We represent stability, which serves as a guarantee that the United States will look to us for further opportunities," said Mr. Pichardo.

DA also works through public-private partnerships to expand, renovate, and upgrade airport facilities. For example, the ongoing expansion of Punta Cana International Airport's terminal B, with an investment of approximately US\$80 million, will increase its current yearly capacity of 8 million passengers by a further three million, bringing even more tourist dollars into the country.

Another key priority for DA is sustainability. Airport oper-

ators have implemented a carbon footprint accreditation program and installed solar panels to reduce CO₂ emissions, underscoring a commitment to environmental responsibility.

Looking ahead, DA is prioritizing the creation of new airport spaces and a national heliport network. Importantly, it is involved in developing the Cabo Rojo international airport to boost tourism in the southern region. "Undoubtedly this project will represent a revolution in the Dominican Republic's tourism sector," added Mr. Pichardo. ■

Dominican Aviation Sector Takes Off

The Dominican Civil Aviation Institute (IDAC) is responsible for overseeing and regulating the country's rapidly growing civil aviation sector.

IDAC is overseeing tremendous movement in the country's aviation field, aided by the dynamic vision of its director general, Héctor Porcella Dumas. But despite hitting the country's highest-ever air operations last year, Mr. Porcella is far from finished. "Our expectations, performance, and vision for 2023 are to surpass those numbers," he said.

The Dominican Republic's bond with the United States will be important to this success. The US is the country's main trading partner and largest source of tourists, with around 40% of arrivals coming from there. Mr. Porcella said that this strategic alliance is fundamental to the country's development, espe-



Photo: IDAC

cially in terms of civil aviation and commercial exchange.

"The Dominican Republic is a natural ally for the US, given its strategic location and leadership in agricultural and tourism industries," he said. "The aviation relationship between the two countries is excellent, with close

cooperation and technical training from the FAA."

As a sign that the relationship is set to deepen, the Dominican Republic is poised to sign a long-awaited Open Skies Agreement with the US. This will increase air traffic, connectivity, and tourist inflow, elements which Mr.

Porcella said are "critical" to growing the country's most important tourism market, representing 32% of arrivals in 2022.

In addition, the Cabo Rojo International Airport project promises to bring the Dominican Republic a modern international airport on schedule, fulfilling President Luis Abinader's vision for developing the south. Mr. Porcella said: "We will ensure that the airport is environmentally conscious and compliant with CO2 reduction goals by 2050." ■



<https://www.idac.gob.do>

INTERVIEW



HÉCTOR PORCELLA DUMAS
DIRECTOR GENERAL,
INSTITUTO DOMINICANO
DE AVIACIÓN CIVIL (IDAC)

Since his appointment in 2020, Héctor Porcella Dumas has used his experience in the private, industrial, and commercial sectors to successfully bring the Dominican Republic out of the pandemic. Now, growth and innovation are his priority.

Q: How is IDAC working with the Dominican government to deliver a world-class aviation sector?

We strictly comply with the established regulations and work in close collaboration with the FAA in the United States and the EASA in Europe. These organizations set high standards and demand that we maintain a close relationship with them to foster cooperation agreements and keep our staff updated on what is happening every day in civil aviation.

Q: How will IDAC ensure the success of the Cabo Rojo project?

The project requires an airport to attract tourists and accelerate development. The IDAC is responsible for certifying air-

ports and issuing airport permits, which means we will work closely with the private sector to ensure the airport meets both Dominican and international laws and regulations.

"The Dominican Republic is a natural ally for the US."

Q: What notable achievements can you share from your tenure?

The most crucial aspect of our operations here in the Dominican Republic is maintaining operational safety in all areas. Despite facing numerous challenges, we strive to ensure that our human resources are well-suited and trained and that we conduct necessary recurrent training.

Q: How does IDAC tackle environmental responsibility in aviation?

The Dominican Republic has designed alternative fuels from sugar cane, which we have presented to the ICAO (International Civil Aviation Organization). This project is a great example of how we can produce environmentally friendly fuel and reduce CO2 pollution.

Q: What are your main priorities for 2023?

The National Congress is considering a civil aviation incentive bill, which will offer reductions in income tax, non-payment of advances, and company asset reduction – all beneficial for long-term economic development.

INTERVIEW

Noval Properties: Shaping Dominican Real Estate

The leading property development firm emphasizes sustainable and innovative projects, with a focus on exceptional quality and bespoke customer service.



Cesar Latrilla, CEO, Noval Properties

Noval Properties is leading the pack in the Dominican Republic's buoyant real estate sector. At the helm, CEO Cesar Latrilla is steering a course with precision, backed by over 27 years of experience in the industry. His vision is evident in the company's impressive portfolio, with over 3,000 residential, commercial, and hotel units constructed to date, generating more than US\$1 billion in sales.

Under a two-year strategic plan, which includes launching eight projects totaling 6,500 units, Noval expects to bring in an additional US\$1.5 billion in revenue. Latrilla's long-term vision is equally ambitious. "My goal is to transform Noval Properties into a multinational business

with American and European standards," he said.

The company's strategic expansion includes its first development in the capital, Santo Domingo. The Jardines de Bellas Artes project – a series of luxury apartments, with a design based on sustainability and functional spaces, also includes a boutique hotel located on the top three floors of the building. In addition, the company is balancing growth with a firm commitment to sustainability, evidenced by Noval's green seal certification from Soy Verde Dominicana.

Latrilla is keen to stress the many opportunities for external investors in the country's real estate sector. "The Dominican Republic is a wonderful, safe country where people can still dream big," he said. ■

As a frontrunner in the Dominican Republic's vibrant real estate sector, Cesar Latrilla has guided Noval Properties to prioritize customer service, location, and quality – all of which run seamlessly alongside an ambitious expansion and growth strategy.

Q: What have been your major achievements since you were appointed as CEO?

The first decision I made was to align the company with the owner's vision, which was to expand. We focused on developing the marketing and commercial departments. Once we attracted investors and buyers, we had to resize our back-office operations to match the sales volume.

"Our company prioritizes location, choosing only the best."

Q: How does Noval Properties stand out in the Dominican Republic's real estate sector?

Our company prioritizes location, choosing only the best. We sell furniture as part of the project and manage the rooms or apartments with hotel brands. This hassle-free, 360-degree approach, combined with prime locations, creates a winning formula.

Q: What does your expansion into Santo Domingo mean for long-term growth?

We realized that establishing a presence in Santo Domingo was crucial for our strategic plan. Earlier this year, we launched a \$45 million project, and we have already sold 50% of it.

Q: How is the economic growth of the Dominican Republic reflected in your sector?

The Dominican Republic offers many opportunities due to its political stability, strong and dollarized currency, and low-risk environment. We provide real estate assets in dollar value, with sales in dollars, to capitalize on these opportunities.

Q: How can closer bilateral ties between the Dominican Republic and the US benefit your business?

One initiative, proposed by Frank Rainieri, owner of Punta Cana airport, aims to simplify customs procedures. Its approval could attract more tourists and investors, benefiting not only Noval Properties but the overall economy as well.

Q: What are your priorities now?

To continually improve and grow our company. As we continue to expand, I will focus on providing excellent service to both brokers and clients.

WE VALUE YOUR TRUST



The Logistics Epicenter of the Region

Under project manager Máximo Mella Jr.'s guidance, Ageport is evolving from a family-run entity to a global corporation, fueled by innovation and sustainability.

Boasting a legacy extending over three decades, Ageport has carved out a prevailing niche for itself within the maritime logistics services sector. The dynamic partnership between Mr. Mella Jr. and Francisco Arias has vibrantly been responsible for putting forth an ambitious trajectory that seeks to augment Ageport's influence and reach within the global spectrum.

This strategic repositioning has rendered Ageport as an indispensable player and part of President Luis Abinader's blueprint for the transformation of the Dominican Republic into a global epicenter for trade and logistics. "A shared vi-

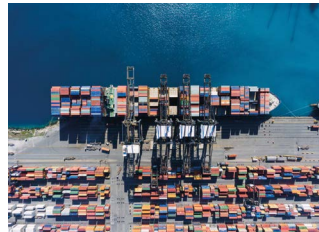


Photo: Ageport

sion that we are actively promoting," affirmed Mr. Mella Jr. when referring to the matter.

Technology and sustainable innovations conform vital elements within Ageport's expansion plans. Mella Jr., project manager and the youngest member sitting on the company's Board, champions an initiative-taking approach towards innovation. One

that is distinctly visible through the investments in avant-garde software development such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and cargo handling technologies that are particularly of note in the Dominican market.

"I purposefully designate significant importance to the proper use and implementation of technology and will continue to advocate and drive the company's focus towards bringing these emerging practices and ideas to life," he stated.

"As part of our commitment to the environment, we strive to become as carbon neutral as we possibly can, investing heavily on green energy." As Ageport

sets its sights on broadening its footprint in the US market, a bevy of compelling opportunities have visibly projected their interests.

Mr. Mella Jr. is keen on presenting Ageport as the go-to logistics service in the Caribbean, harnessing the strategic geographical advantages of the nation and its citizens. "Our unique leverage lies in our people," he emphasized. "We are a family-oriented company, with a strong focus on customer service, placing the wellbeing of our team at the core." ■



www.ageport.com

INTERVIEW



MÁXIMO MELLA JR.,
PROJECT MANAGER,
AGEPORT (DR)

Q: Where does Ageport currently stand in terms of market share in the Dominican Republic, and how are you working to increase this?

Currently, Ageport has been successful at adapting to the current market, introducing more efficient and sustainable

ways of doing business, focusing on strengthening our corporate structure and expanding into the global sphere. For the past seven years, we have experienced double digital growth every year. Encouraging us to consistently look to work on new business, remaining open to supporting all favorable paths that benefit the company and country's position as a leading logistics service hub. We look forward to increasing our current roster and continuing to provide comprehensive quality solutions across the entire logistics chain.

Q: How has Ageport's rapid growth and acquisition of new market lines contributed to client experience?

In the last few years, Ageport

has proudly led the introduction of new market lines into the country. What this signifies for both the Dominican people and market is a great step towards advancement at a national level. The reason being that not only are new companies entering the local market, but there is also an increase in logistical routes. As a direct result of these efforts, local businesses can connect with other countries faster, more efficiently and cost-effectively.

Q: What opportunities exist in the sector for US partners and investors?

Driven by recent changes in the laws governing logistics operators, the local market is undergoing a promising

transformation. A public-private partnership aims to make of the Dominican Republic the Caribbean's Hub, thus presenting remarkable investment opportunities.

Q: How do you want Ageport to be perceived by clients?

As a young dynamic company, we stay true to actively igniting innovation. A characteristic that will for certain set us apart as we progress towards increasing our presence on the global scale. As part of our vision of growth, we like to consider ourselves as targeted allies when servicing customers, treating every task with utmost respect, and valuing all prospects encountered along the way.

Charting a New Course for Dominican Logistics

Neutral Logistics is spearheading the Dominican Republic's transformation into a pivotal global logistics epicenter.



"International companies should see us as an alternative distribution hub."

MANUEL RODRIGUEZ,
CEO, NEUTRAL LOGISTICS

When Manuel Rodriguez took the reins of Neutral Logistics in 2008, he sought to rewrite the narrative of cargo transportation in the Dominican Republic. As an exclusive representative

of the WorldWide Alliance, the company has carved a niche for itself with its unique focus on Less-Than-Container Load (LCL) shipping.

The company has played a significant role in endorsing the Dominican Republic as a logistics hub, with its vision closely aligning with the Abinader administration's plans for sector growth. "We share the government's vision to position the Republic as a global logistics powerhouse," Rodriguez stated. "There is a joint effort between the government and private sector to create awareness of our country."

Neutral Logistics' strategic expansion into Puerto Rico, Kingston, and Trinidad showcases their commitment to reaching out to smaller mar-



Photo: Neutral Logistics

kets, often overlooked by larger freight companies. "We cater to these markets with unmatched efficiency," said Rodriguez. "Our connectivity creates opportunities for bigger countries like China to export to the region with reduced transit times."

The company is also boosting international trade by opening up new transit routes to emerging markets like Guyana and Barbados. "International com-

panies should see us as an alternative distribution hub," Rodriguez stated. "Our mission now is to convince our partners in the EU, China, and Central-South America to ship their goods via the Dominican Republic."

Adopting a digital-first approach to this task, the company offers advanced technologies like real-time tracking and load calculation tools. However, Rodriguez credits the company's success to his people. "Our achievements are a testament to the unwavering commitment and ingenuity of our staff – the true champions of our success story." ■



<https://neutrallogistics.com>

Burocracia Cero: A Revolution in Public Administration

Peter A. Prazmowski, executive director of the National Competitiveness Council, leads a core initiative of the Abinader administration driving efficiency and transparency in public office.



"Burocracia Cero's purpose is to promote the efficiency of public administration through clear, timely, and transparent regulatory frameworks."

PETER A. PRAZMOWSKI,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NATIONAL
COMPETITIVENESS COUNCIL

Q: What is the motivation behind Burocracia Cero?

The Dominican Republic suffers from high regulatory burdens, which affect productivity and

the business climate. Burocracia Cero's purpose is to promote the efficiency of public administration through clear, timely, and transparent regulatory frameworks. The program is coordinated by an Executive Commission made up of the *Ministerio de Administración Pública* (MAP), the *Ministerio de la Presidencia* (MINPRE), the *Consejo Nacional de Competitividad* (CNC) and the *Oficina Gubernamental de Tecnologías de la Información y Comunicación* (OGTIC).

Q: How will the program enhance transparency?

Strategies include regulatory improvement, simplification and improvement of services, digitalization and automation, monitoring and experimen-

tation, interoperability, and omnichannel integration. Online procedures and services provide transparency and traceability while monitoring systems track performance indicators and address citizen complaints for accountability.

Q: In what way does Burocracia Cero streamline the process for foreign investors?

The One-Stop Investment Window (VUI) and Construction Window (VUC) initiatives integrate procedures, reduce response times, and enhance efficiency. Also, we are using models of risk transfer through accreditation, quality standards, and accountability such as those implemented in our customs and food and

drug administration. This has allowed us to reduce the time it takes to issue permits from months to just a few hours.

Q: How will you address potential challenges?

Burocracia Cero tackles significant challenges in institutional efficiency, regulations, and the digital divide. We have set ambitious goals, but they depend on strategic prioritization to obtain impact results, considering factors such as economic and social cost, demand, and sector impact. ■



A Global Leader in Niche Agriculture

The United States offers significant export opportunities for Dominican farmers, with agricultural exports to the US reaching a record of US\$2.2 billion in 2022, marking a 14% increase year-on-year.

Agriculture, employing nine per cent of the country's active population, plays a vital role in the Dominican Republic's economy, occupying the fourth-largest economic sector. Despite the decline of traditional agriculture since the 1980s, the last decade has seen an encouraging surge in the niche market of organic and fair-trade products.

The country boasts approximately 14,000 organic growers, one of the largest contingents in Latin America. A significant component of this growth is cocoa, a crop that has catapulted the Dominican Republic to global prominence. Remarkably, the nation is a world leader in organic cocoa exports, accounting for a sizeable 60% of total global volume.

This success hinges on around 40,000 dedicated producers who manage over 150,000 hectares of lush cocoa plantations. International Cocoa Organization standards confirm that 40% of the cocoa produced here qualifies as 'fine', signifying the potential for even higher yields in the future.

Since August 2020, Minister of Agriculture, Limber Cruz Roja, has facilitated further progress for the sector. One notable achievement under his tenure is the revitalization of INESPRES, an institution that plays a key role in price stabilization, benefiting both producers and consumers alike.



LIMBER L. CRUZ LÓPEZ
MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE

Q: What were the big calls you made to keep Dominican agriculture afloat during the pandemic?

The Abinader administration inherited the country in a unique situation due to the pandemic, with the downturn in tourism necessitating a greater urgency in finding alternative forms of income. I therefore presented seven proposals for the agriculture sector, focusing on financing, research, production, productivity, water, commercialization, and infrastructure improvements.

After receiving the president's approval to proceed, we assembling a team of individuals with the competence, determination, and resolve to accomplish the task, with myself – a lifelong agricultural producer

and exporter – at the helm. The first thing we did was to allow farmers to access interest-free loans, significantly boosting production capacity. As a result of this, new records for Dominican production have since been reached.

“As an economist I put great emphasis on human capital.”

Q: How have these initiatives benefitted the sector?

We previously imported over 1,000,000 quintals of rice, and now we have a surplus of 1,500,000 quintals. We've also built over 6,000 kilometers of country roads, sought cheaper, faster, and more efficient water solutions, and leveraged INESPRES, which benefits both the producer and the consumer by offering fairer prices. Additionally, we've further developed various institutions to help the poorest sectors, including INABIE which provides meals for 2.2 million students daily.

Q: How are you ensuring that the sector continues to innovate?

As an economist I put great emphasis on human capital, considered the fourth essential element alongside capital, labor, and land. To this end, we've trained our technicians and agronomists in the use of modern technology, following the tenets of agriculture 4.0. For example, we created SIDIAGRO, a digital platform that geo-referentially locates producers, their products, production timelines, and yields. This allows for better projections and alerts us to potential risks of food shortages or surpluses.

Q: What potential does the sector hold for investors?

We are favorably situated, just a few hours from the US and easily connected with other world economies. The Dominican Republic has a favorable climate that allows the production of diverse products, along with a positive political climate and investor-friendly laws. ■

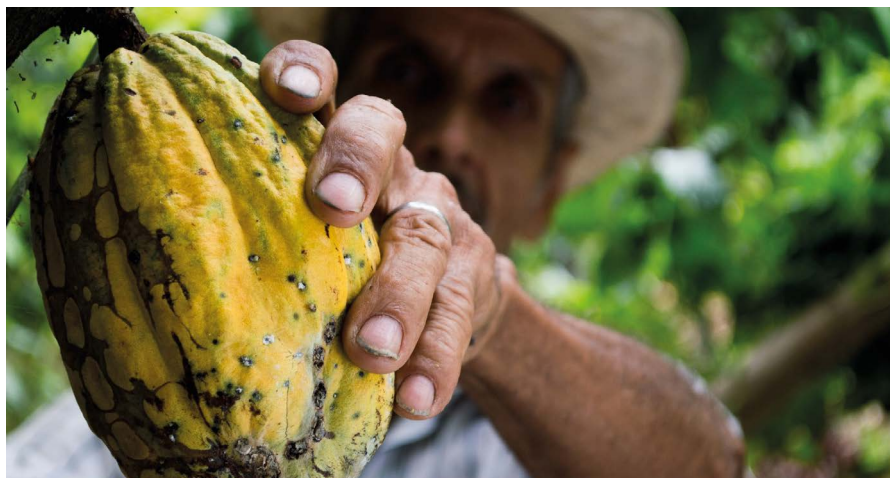


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