The Role of Development Banking in Financial Education as a Tool for Inclusion and Economic Development

Financial education is one of the core actions of Development Banking to advance progressively and consistently toward social inclusion and development. Various initiatives across Latin America and the Caribbean aim to strengthen financial knowledge, skills, and decision-making among households, entrepreneurial ventures, and other segments, with potential impacts on economic inclusion and overall well-being.



Financial education has become a strategic tool for Development Banking, as it helps improve the relationship of households, entrepreneurs, rural producers, micro and small enterprises, and subnational governments with the financial system. Its importance lies not only in expanding access to financial services, but also in promoting their more effective, secure, and development-oriented use. In this regard, recent evidence underscores that financial inclusion should not be understood solely as account ownership, but also as the capacity to use financial services for payments, savings, credit, and risk management, particularly in an increasingly digitalized environment[1].

Financial education can no longer be separated from digital financial literacy, understood as the set of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors required to use digital financial services safely and in support of financial well-being.

Tabla n.º 1. Selected Financial Education Programs and Products in Development Banks

Institution	Country	Program or Product	Main Contribution
Banco Ciudad	Argentina	Finanzas para Crecer / Cuenta Crecer	Brings savings and banking operations closer to youth and adolescents by combining practical training with early integration into the financial system.
Banco de Desarrollo Productivo (BDP)	Bolivia	Aula BDP	Web and mobile platform for continuous training for producers and entrepreneurs, offering flexible access and applied content.
BanEcuador B.P.	Ecuador	Programa de Educación Financiera	Strengthens budgeting and savings habits, as well as the responsible use of financial products among households and entrepreneurial ventures.
Banco de Desarrollo del Ecuador B.P.	Ecuador	Educación financiera para gobiernos subnacionales	Links financial literacy with debt management, obligations, and the financial management of local governments.
Crédito Hipotecario Nacional (CHN)	Guatemala	Banco del Niño	Promotes the habit of saving from an early age through an account designed for minors.
Caja de Ahorros	Panama	Cuenta Caja de los Niños	*Incorporates early financial education and savings planning for children and their families.*
Agencia Nacional de Desarrollo (ANDE)	Uruguay	Talleres de educación financiera para emprendimientos y pequeñas empresas	Addresses budgeting, credit, payment methods, and the prevention of over-indebtedness for MSMEs and entrepreneurial ventures.

Prepared in-house based on institutional information.

In LAC, where high levels of informality, territorial gaps, low productivity, and unequal financial capabilities persist, having an account, accessing credit, or using digital payment methods does not in itself guarantee better economic outcomes. The expansion of digitalization further reinforces this need, as access to the financial system is increasingly carried out through wallets, applications, transfers, and electronic payments. While this creates new opportunities, it also requires greater capabilities in terms of understanding, security, and risk protection.

Therefore, financial education can no longer be separated from digital financial literacy, understood as the set of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors required to use digital financial services safely and in support of financial well-being[2]. Financial education strengthens the quality of intermediation and the effectiveness of Development Banking.

AN OVERVIEW OF PROGRAMS AND PRODUCTS

Before distinguishing target groups and modalities, it is useful to consider the range of initiatives already being implemented across the region. Various development finance institutions have begun to develop programs, accounts, platforms, and financial education services that address different, yet complementary, needs (Table No. 1). Some initiatives are aimed at children and adolescents to promote early savings habits and familiarity with the financial system. Others target entrepreneurs, small producers, or MSMEs, linking content to concrete decisions related to budgeting, credit, payment methods, or cash flow management. Finally, others are tailored to subnational governments or specific groups that need to strengthen their financial management capabilities.

The various programs reflect the diversity of the target populations served. Therefore, a segmented and functional perspective is useful for better understanding the scope of these initiatives.

PROGRAMS FOR EARLY-STAGE FINANCIAL EDUCATION

A first group comprises programs aimed at children, adolescents, and youth, whose main objective is to foster early habits of saving, planning, and familiarity with the use of basic financial products. These initiatives are particularly relevant because sustainable financial inclusion depends not only on expanding access, but also on building capabilities from early stages of life.

In Argentina, Banco Ciudad has operationalized this approach through Finanzas para Crecer and Cuenta Crecer. The initiative combines theoretical and practical workshops with early financial onboarding tools, linking learning to concrete

decisions on savings, account usage, and a basic understanding of banking operations. The program has reached a significant scale in training activities and account openings for adolescents, demonstrating how financial education can be integrated into the product ecosystem rather than being limited to standalone initiatives by the bank.

Along the same lines, Banco del Niño of Crédito Hipotecario Nacional de Guatemala and Cuenta Caja de los Niños of Caja de Ahorros of Panamá illustrate another approach: promoting the habit of saving from an early age through financial products specifically designed for minors and their families. The importance of these initiatives lies in introducing financial education at a formative stage, linking it to everyday practices and to an initial engagement with the financial system.

In these cases, learning is not presented as abstract content, but rather as part of a concrete experience. Financial education becomes more effective when it is linked to real and simple decisions. This can help build more sustainable social inclusion over time.

PLATFORMS AND PROGRAMS FOR PRODUCERS, ENTREPRENEURS, AND MSMES

A second line of action brings together initiatives aimed at producers, entrepreneurs, and small economic units. Here, financial education plays a key role, as this segment faces complex decisions with limited room for error: managing cash flow, separating household and business finances, assessing the cost of credit, organizing payments, and selecting appropriate financing instruments.

In Bolivia, Aula BDP represents a noteworthy initiative. It is a web and mobile platform for continuous training for producers and entrepreneurs, offering flexible access and practical content. Its value lies in bringing financial training closer to users who are not always able to participate in ongoing in-person programs, doing so through a format that is more adaptable to their pace and needs. In this case, digitalization expands the reach of non-financial services and enables learning processes to be sustained in a more accessible manner.

In Ecuador, BanEcuador B.P. has developed a Programa de Educación Financiera aimed at strengthening capabilities in personal and productive finance, linking content on budgeting, savings, and the responsible use of financial products with the specific challenges faced by households and entrepreneurial ventures. Institutional information also indicates significant participation by women, which further underscores the value of these initiatives in terms of economic inclusion.

In Uruguay, financial education workshops for entrepreneurial ventures and small businesses promoted by Agencia Nacional de Desarrollo reflect a similarly practical approach. The content focuses on budgeting, credit, payment methods, and the prevention of over-indebtedness—that is, on decisions directly linked to the economic sustainability of small businesses. Financial education is thus connected to concrete management challenges.

Programs targeting these segments share an important feature: they do not separate learning from the user's economic activity. On the contrary, they bring financial education closer to cash flow, pricing, supplier relationships, the use of payment methods, and an understanding of financing.

FINANCIAL EDUCATION APPLIED TO PUBLIC AND TERRITORIAL MANAGEMENT

A third line of work, less common but particularly relevant, is the one that adapts financial education to the needs of subnational governments. In this case, the objective is not only to improve the relationship of individuals or companies with the financial system,





Source: BanEcuador

The programs do not separate learning from the user's economic activity; rather, they bring financial education closer to cash flow, pricing, supplier relationships, the use of payment methods, and an understanding of financing.

but also to strengthen institutional capacities in debt management, obligations, budgeting, and public financial management.

In Ecuador, Banco de Desarrollo del Ecuador B.P. has developed specific financial education content for decentralized autonomous governments, linking learning to debt management and territorial financial management. This approach broadens the traditional scope of financial education and demonstrates that it can also serve as a valuable tool for improving the quality of public management at the local level.

These types of programs are important because local governments play an increasingly significant role in the provision of infrastructure, services, and territorial development projects. When their financial capacities are weak, the risks of unsustainable decisions or inefficient use of available financing increase. From this perspective, financial education can contribute to improving the quality of public investment and the sustainability of subnational credit operations.

LESSONS LEARNED AND IMPLICATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT

Taken together, these initiatives show that financial education is more effective when it starts from concrete needs and is linked to users' real decisions. An adolescent learns better when the content is connected to their first account and the use of payment methods; an entrepreneur, when it can be applied to cash flow, the cost of a loan, or business organization; and a local government, when training is tied to its budget, obligations, and projects. They also show that format matters: the most effective programs do not simply convey concepts, but translate technical notions into everyday decisions and combine in-person workshops, digital materials, self-learning platforms, and mobile tools. This makes it possible to expand coverage without losing relevance, which is particularly valuable in remote areas or among segments with time and access constraints.

These initiatives also show that financial education and digital inclusion can no longer be addressed separately. Moreover, their importance goes beyond individual learning. At the household level, it improves the management of budgeting, savings, credit, and debt; in micro and small enterprises, it strengthens cash management, investment planning, and relationships with financial institutions and public programs; and in rural areas, it facilitates better alignment between credit, production cycles, costs, and timelines. For Development Banking, improved financial education also enhances the quality of demand, promotes a more structured use of financial products, and strengthens the effectiveness of public action.

Therefore, financial education should not be seen as a secondary activity, but as a vital component that enables more sustainable financial inclusion and more effective development financing.

1 World Bank. (2025). The Global Findex Database 2025: Connectivity and Financial Inclusion in the Digital Economy.

2 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2024). OECD/INFE Survey Instrument to Measure Digital Financial Literacy