

# DEVELOPING COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM IN BENIN



## PROJECT OBJECTIVE

The project ran from 2008 to 2010 with the objective of involving and integrating local entrepreneurs and communities into the tourism value chain, improving the economic well-being of the local poor, enabling tourism growth and protecting the environment. The project aimed at the mainstreaming of inclusive tourism in the global politic of tourism development in Benin by increasing political awareness. The project was part of International Trade Centre's (ITC) Export-led Poverty Reduction Programme (EPRP) which aimed to help poor community producers by enhancing their entrepreneurial capacity and to understand and meet market requirements. EPRP furthermore created and enhanced sustainable and fair market linkages between local producers and tourism markets.

## CONTEXT

The project was based on the findings of ITC's opportunity study which showed that the percentage of international tourists visiting Benin was small (30%) compared to regional tourists (70%) and that they mostly came for work and stayed in the surroundings of Cotonou. Moreover, the excursions they undertook were so short that local communities of visited villages could not really benefit from tourism. The pilot projects were developed in three locations (Ouidah, Abomey and Ganvié) according to specific criteria: sustainability of the project, the pace of the project implementation, the time needed to obtain tangible results and the benefits for local communities. Every village having its own particularities, it seemed better to concentrate the efforts on one product per site. Ganvié is a lake dwelling accessible from the pier Calavi-Abomey and faced an ecological problem: The water hyacinth that prevents shipping during some part of the year. Abomey is the historical capital of the country and a sacred ground of the Voodoo culture in Benin. As for Ouidah, it is the former slave boarding centre and a very symbolic place of the country.

## ACTIVITIES

The first activity, led in the three sites, aimed at increasing the population and local authorities' awareness on the development potential of tourism to improve the relationships and interactions between tourists visiting and villagers (learn about tourists' expectations, protection of the environment and traditional houses, etc.). That was done through radio and TV shows on the theme of tourism, its actors, environment and cultural interactions. The second activity led on the three sites was a communication campaign to list the products and itineraries that could be offered to tourists, to prepare maps and a brochure to be distributed to the selected embassies. The objective was to make the tourists stay longer in the villages so that the local communities could really benefit from tourism.

As second step, specific activities were defined and implemented in each village:

In Ganvié, a workshop for the transformation and marketing of water hyacinth in souvenirs (bags, hats, and baskets) was put in place following the example of the Tonle Lake in Cambodia. The objective was to transform an ecological burden into an economic opportunity with the help of the francophone association Osmose, which had already intervened in Cambodia. Two women from Ganvié were then sent to Cambodia to follow a four weeks training on the transformation techniques of water Hyacinth. In Ouidah, the historical heritage of the city was emphasised and a refreshment bar where tourists can taste local products (juices, nuts) was built adjunct to the tourist office. It also enabled the tourist office to promote Ouidah's products by organizing tasting events for professionals in the tourism sector. A historical fresco on the town's history and important figures was painted by a local artist. It was used to promote the tourist office, the refreshment bar and served as a support by Ouidah's touristic guides. Finally, a project of transformation and marketing of a 100% organic soap was developed in Abomey. The objective was to substitute the imported ones with locally produced soaps as supply to hotels and shops in Abomey. The goal was to sell them to individuals and to become the main soap supplier in Benin hotels. The soaps were also to be sold to tourists as souvenirs in the tourist office.

## RESULTS ACHIEVED SO FAR

Water hyacinth transformation techniques were shared with local population in Ganvié. This training helped to elaborate other projects to develop inclusive tourism and widen the range of benefits obtained from the transformation of water hyacinth. For instance, the implementation of floating gardens helped to secure food for the most vulnerable families and enabled a local organic production of flowers and vegetables that were sold to hotels and restaurants in Ganvié. The refreshment bar built in Ouidah is a masterpiece of local architecture and ensures additional income to the tourist office, enabling it to widen and improve its services and information offer. The fresco was finished and is now a very useful witness of the rich past of Ouidah, especially when it was used as a slave boarding centre. Moreover, the touristic map and the promotional brochure of the project were finalized and distributed in the embassies and consulates of French speaking countries and in travel agencies.

## IMPACT ON THE POOR

The impact on the poor included awareness of the income potential tourism represents as well as increased income of farmers, artisans and local SMEs and producers selling their products and services to tourists. As per region; in Ganvié the training in hyacinth transformation techniques provided to local communities led to a positive environmental impact. Jobs were created for 25 women and salaries increased by 50% for craft producers, in Abomey jobs were created and income increased five-fold for 25 women and in Ouidah the tourist office had a much higher visibility, conviviality, and attractiveness, the sales increased significantly, leading to a turnover of \$12,000 per annum.

## SUSTAINABILITY OF THE INTERVENTION

TV and radio communication campaigns aiming at familiarizing the villagers and local authorities to community based and sustainable tourism started under the project and will go on. The water hyacinth transformation project in Ganvié is expected to drive new eco-tourism related projects in the country.

## FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT



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