



COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM: A SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE IN EL SALVADOR



PROJECT OBJECTIVE

Between 2003 and 2007, the International Trade Centre implemented a community-based tourism (CBT) project in the province of Chalatenango, which is located in the north of El Salvador, at the border with Honduras. The pilot project focused on the communities in the villages of La Palma and San Ignacio, as well as in the mountainous area called the “Zona Alta” at 2,750 metres above sea level. The CBT project aimed at integrating small-scale farmers, family restaurants and hotels as well as producers of artisanal products into the tourism value chains. Furthermore, the project’s goal was to achieve spill-over effects of tourism, thus creating better living conditions and providing more jobs and income for the 40.000 inhabitants of the region.

The project was part of ITC’s Export-led Poverty Reduction Programme (EPRP) which aimed at helping 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.



THE CONTEXT

The rich touristic offer by El Salvador has not been fully exploited mainly due to a wrong perception international tourists have due to the country's past armed local conflicts. Chalatenango has great potential for community-based tourism, given the broad variety of activities offered. The whole region provides many opportunities for physical activities such as hiking, horseback riding, golf, rafting, kayaking and other kinds of activities in a beautiful mountainous scenery, as well as potential for agri-tourism development. The village of La Palma is famous for its wooden and colourful handicrafts which are sold by a large number of small craft shops. San Ignacio counts three hotels and a few restaurants. La Palma offers four hotels, few restaurants, as well as a hotel-restaurant.

ACTIVITIES

In collaboration with the Ecole Hôtelière de Lausanne (EHL), four graduate students based in San Ignacio and La Palma, facilitated cooperation and mutual support between members of the hospitality sector on the one hand and the farmers and artisans on the other hand. The creation of these linkages concretely implied that hotels and restaurants have started buying food from regional farmers and organizing guided tours to handicraft markets and shops. Furthermore, the students of the EHL trained the service personal in guest attention and reception, hygiene, marketing and promotion, quality and competitiveness to improve their attractiveness as a tourist destination. A comprehensive study was carried out for Cooperativa la Palma, a hotel and restaurant, identifying problems and providing solutions.

Moreover, a professional tourism information centre has been installed, located conveniently at the roadside on the way to La Palma and San Ignacio. With the help of ITC, information and marketing material was produced and is handed out, informing visitors about activities, shops, restaurants and accommodation.

RESULTS ACHIEVED

Local hotel and restaurant staff has enhanced its performance in hospitality-related occupations in terms of management, marketing and promotion, as well as quality and competitiveness. Tourism has also been incorporated in the curriculum of the local secondary school. In addition, local groups, trained by ITC, began to provide tourist information to visitors.

IMPACT ON THE POOR

Impact on the poor resulting from this project was awareness of the potential income generated by tourism for family restaurants, hotels, small-scale farmers and producers of artisanal products. Moreover, a plan to incorporate local agricultural producers in the tourism value chain was formulated and succeeded in mobilising national institutions in a number of complementary initiatives, such as improving access roads, setting up and operating rural schools.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS AND SUSTAINABILITY OF THE INTERVENTION

As a further step, and taking into consideration the good results of the pilot project, the Ministry of tourism replicated the project to five additional selected destinations.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT



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