OBJECTIVES OF THE EXPORT-LED POVERTY REDUCTION PROGRAMME

The EPRP project in Benin was launched in July 2009, in the context of the integrated framework, 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 aims at the mainstreaming of inclusive tourism in the global politic of tourism development in Benin by increasing the politicians awareness on the issue.

CONTEXT

The percentage of international tourists visiting Benin remains small (30%) compared to regional tourist (70%), who mostly come for work and stay in the surroundings of Cotonou. Moreover, the excursions they undertake are so short that local communities of visited villages can’t 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.

Ganvié is a lake dwelling accessible from the pier Calavi-Abomey and faces 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. Every village having its own particularities, it seemed better to concentrate the efforts on one product per site.

ACTIVITIES

The first activity, led in the three sites, aimed at increasing the population and local authorities’ awareness on the development of inclusive tourism to improve the relationships and interactions between tourists visiting and villagers (learn about tourists’ expectations, protection of the environment and traditional houses...). 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 is to make the tourists stay longer in the villages so that the local communities can really benefit from tourism.
Then, specific activities were defined and led in each village:
In Ganvié, a workshop for the transformation and marketing of water hyacinth in souvenirs (bags, hats...) was put in place following the example of the Tonle Lake in Cambodia. The objective is to transform an ecological burden into an economic opportunity with the help of the francophone association Osmose, which had already intervened in Cambodia.
In Ouidah, the historical heritage of the city was emphasised. A refreshment bar where tourists can taste local products (juices, nuts...) was built within the tourist office. It also enables 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 is used to promote the tourist office, the refreshment bar and serves 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 is to substitute these soaps produced locally to the ones imported, to supply hotels and shops in Abomey. The ultimate goal would be to sell them to individuals and to become the main soap supplier in Benin hotels. The soaps will also be sold to tourists as souvenirs in the tourist office.

RESULTS ACHIEVED SO FAR

Two women from Ganvié were sent to Cambodia to follow a four weeks training on the transformation techniques of water hyacinth and they are now capable to train other men and women. 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 (a base of hyacinth weeds on which vegetable such as tomatoes or lettuce can be grown) would secure food for the most vulnerable families and would enable a local organic production of flowers and vegetables that could be 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 is finished and is a very useful witness of the rich past of Ouidah, especially when it was used as a slave boarding centre.
The training on biological soap production is finished and the workshop is working well despite a few improvements that still need to be made on the soap quality and their packaging. Moreover, the touristic map and the promotional brochure of the project are finalized and will be distributed in the embassies and consulates of French speaking countries and in travel agencies.

Impact on the poor planned to be achieved in the short term:

- 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.
- Abomey: Jobs were created and income increased five-fold for 25 women.
- Ouidah: The tourist office has a much higher visibility, conviviality, and attractiveness, The sales increased significantly, leading to a turnover of $12,000.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY OF THE INTERVENTION

The activities were further assessed and necessary adjustments defined. In Abomey, the quality of the mould and soap packagings needs to be improved. In Ouidah, a few modifications need to be done on the fresco for it to be understandable by everyone and the range of products sold in the refreshment bar need to be widened with the help of CERPADOEC. In Ganvié, selection criteria to choose the craftsmen that will follow the training have to be set to be able to start the training. Moreover, the TV and radio communication campaign aiming at familiarizing the villagers and local authorities to community based and sustainable tourism will go on.

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