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

PROJECT OBJECTIVE

In August 2003, ITC launched a community-based tourism (CBT) project in the province of Chalatenango, which is located in the north of El Salvador, on the border of Honduras. To be more concrete, the pilot project focused on the communities in the villages of La Palma and San Ignacio, as well as, in the mountainous area, which is 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 value chains generated by tourism. Furthermore, the project’s goal was to achieve spill-over effects, thus creating better living conditions and providing more jobs and income for the 40,000 inhabitants of the region.
THE CONTEXT

Chalatenango had great potential for community-based tourism, given the broad variety of activities offered and the well-known typical handicraft produced locally. The village of La Palma is famous for its wooden and colourful handicrafts which are sold by a large number of little artisan shops. The whole region provides various opportunities for physical activities such as hiking, horseback riding, golf, rafting, kayaking and other kinds of activities in a beautiful mountainous scenery.

ACTIVITIES

In collaboration with consultants of the Ecole Hôtelière de Lausanne (EHL), the project facilitated the 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 has concretely implied that hotels and restaurants have started buying food from regional farmers and organizing guided tours to the handicraft markets and shops. Furthermore, the consultants of the EHL trained the service personal in guest attention and reception, hygiene, marketing and promotion, quality and competitiveness, so as to improve their attractiveness as a tourist destination.

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, an attractive brochure was produced and is handed out in the visitors’ centre, informing visitors about activities, shops, restaurants and accommodation.

RESULTS ACHIEVED SO FAR

Local hotel staff has enhanced its performance in hospitality-related occupations. Tourism has been incorporated in the curriculum of local secondary school. In addition, local groups – trained by ITC began to provide tourist information.

IMPACT ON THE POOR

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 in five selected destinations.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT

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