

1. Background of the Project

- Country: Dominican Republic
- Project Name: Sustainable Tourism Based on Public-Private Partnership
- Cooperation Period: 2009 – 2013
- Implementing Organization: State Secretariat for Tourism; National Institute of Professional Technical Training

The Dominican Republic is a country that thrives on tourism and receives the largest number of travelers in the Caribbean countries. In the Puerto Plata province in the north, large-scale beach resorts were developed by foreign investments in the 1970s under the active national tourism promotion policies. By 2000, the resorts became a tourist attraction that nearly 30% of the visitors to the country would come by. However, most of the resort hotels were those in which Western tour operators would bring in tourists by selling package tours, and tourists would spend most of their time inside the hotels. This form of tourism had weak ties with the surrounding area: it did not help revitalize the local economy because it provided few opportunities for local people to take part in tourism businesses and earn income, and failed to direct attention to potential local tourism resources. In recent years, the province faced stiff competition in tourism from the eastern part of the country and neighboring countries. The number of tourists in the province was on a downward trend partly because of the economic slowdown in the countries of North America.



Location of Puerto Plata province

2. Activities of the Project

This project aimed to realize sustainable tourism development by having local people take initiative in developing regional cultural and natural resources and provide a wide variety of tourism products and services

through cooperation among local organizations.

In the early stage of the project activities, a group was formed to take the lead in implementing the project: Municipal Unit for Boosting Community Power (UMPC), a working group for tourism development and operation based on public-private partnership. The UMPC members included municipal governments, churches, business enterprises, non-governmental organizations, neighborhood associations, groups of women producers, and youth groups. Ten UMPCs were established at the municipal level. Additionally, a provincial UMPC network was established as a system of provincial tourism development to support the network of municipal UMPCs. It strengthened cooperation among the municipal UMPCs and promoted tourism products through provincial festivals. It also prepared guidelines for sustainable tourism development and strived to disseminate them to other areas. This was an approach to discover local resources from a wider basis and bring benefits to the entire region.



Meeting of the UMPC network and stakeholders

The project designated as a brand any feasible tourism product concept that expressed characteristics of the region, and developed more than 30 ingenious tourism products and services using local resources. The sales from such products and services reached approximately 3 million pesos (about 7.5 million yen) by the end of the project.

As of May 2013, 156 organizations joined UMPCs, and 23 of them are women's groups. The latter include nine female-dominated groups formed through the project. In addition, 89 out of the 221 representatives of the 156

organizations are female. Here are the three main reasons that women came to participate in the groups.

- (1) The project supported people dedicated to the development of the region, regardless of gender, with the aim of using local resources, and encouraged them to participate in the groups.
- (2) The fact that the project staff members who supported residents were female made it easy for women to build relationships with them based on trust because they were of the same gender.
- (3) The fact that it was possible to make many of the products using local resources at home as a side job encouraged women to take part in the groups.

The tourism products and services by the female-dominated groups include the following. A tour to observe cacao and experience the making of chocolate allows participants to learn about cacao at a cacao farm. They can look at cultivation and harvesting, and experience the making of chocolate while listening to explanations by UMPC members and youth volunteers in the village.



Guides to the cacao experience tour

In a guided tour with community baseball experience, a teenage female guide who is also a baseball player presents a homegrown pitcher who has been playing in US Major League Baseball for more than 10 years, and describes exhibits at the gallery in the local stadium.



A female guide explaining a baseball exhibition

A tourism product of Los Hidalgos is a model of successful brand that UMPC members created using local resources in cooperation with women's groups from the outside. It is hand-knit accessories by the women. The basic concept of the product is "love, peace, unity, pride, and joy." The women perform all the tasks including product development, promotion, and sales. They sell hand-knit accessories and demonstrate how to make them at an annual public fair that started in 2012. The fair is meant to be a family-oriented event that men and women of all ages can enjoy.

As described above, products and services have been developed and designed using local resources and culture, and then promoted and sold through events, festivals, and the media. Then they are evaluated and improved based on the evaluation results. The UMPC network is trying to create a system for sustainable tourism development by forming the provincial coordination agency as a forum for talks with the tourism sector.



A brochure on hand-knit accessories

3. Impacts of the Project from the Gender

Perspective

Women's economic activities are generally limited in rural areas because of such factors as limited access to finance and a prevailing attitude that tends to put men at an advantage. In the project, women occasionally received undue interference from their partners when they took part in the project activities and gained revenues from their products and services. In such cases, women's groups strived to gain the partners' understanding and continue the project activities.

The hand-knit accessory group of Los Hidalgos developed a product by making use of women's traditional techniques. The women of the group took pride in themselves and their activities through selling their products at the fairs and seeing happy customers pick up and purchase them. One of the leaders of the group said, "What matters is not whether our products sell. It is the way the customers look at our products with a smile and their compliments on them that motivate us." It can be seen in other groups as well that women who had tended to stay home gained a pleasure, a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction, and self-confidence in situations in which they could play active roles or assume leadership while developing their skills through the project activities.

The project took a consistently positive approach to find advantages of the region, create self-confidence and pride in women, and invigorate their activities. The project also used women's strengths and roles, and addressed through groups the problems that they faced. It is fair to say that this approach motivated stakeholders including women, encouraged them to participate in the project activities in an energetic fashion, and produced tangible outputs.